



THE BOOK OF  
SECOND

PETER

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by Given O. Blakely

## LESSON #1

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

***“Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:1, NKJV).***

### INTRODUCTION

This Epistle is written to those with faith—the body of Christ. It was written by Peter shortly before his death by martyrdom, to which he refers in 1:14. In a profound way, the Apostle takes up the matter of the knowledge of God (1:2,3,8; 2:20;3:18), showing its indispensable role in our salvation. With Apostolic expertise, he dwells upon the unprecedented privileges of the sons of God, showing the magnificence of life in Christ Jesus. Through the Spirit, Peter will anchor our faith, and urge us to aggressive personal involvement in this great salvation.

Several unique expressions are found in this short but pungent letter. They are concise, and unusually provocative to deep thought. You will never conclude from this letter that Peter was an ***“unlearned and ignorant”*** fisherman. His faith, coupled with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, brought his abilities to their apex. As the aged Apostle reaches the completion of his life, his spiritual discernment is more keen than it has ever been before. His burden is for the people of God to make their calling and election sure. He spares no effort in his expert use of the keys of the Kingdom.

### A SERVANT AND AN APOSTLE OF CHRIST

***“Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ . . .”*** There is a lot in this introduction. First, note the way Peter refers to himself: ***“Simon Peter.”*** Two names—the first, given him by his parents, the second, given to Him by the Lord Jesus Christ. As it is written, ***“And Simon He surnamed Peter”*** (Mk 3:16). This occurred following Peter’s confession that Jesus was ***“the Christ, the Son of the Living God”*** (Matt 16:16-18). The latter name had a greater glory than the former. Thus we frequently read of ***“Simon called Peter,”*** and not vice versa (Matt 4:18); i.e., ***“Simon who is called Peter”*** (Matt 10:2), and ***“Simon, whose surname is Peter”*** (Act 10:5,18,32; 11:13). First nature (*Simon*), then grace (*Peter*). First Adam (*Simon*), then the Lord Jesus (*Peter*). Here is humility (*Simon*), and thanksgiving (*Peter*). First that which is natural (*Simon*), then that which is spiritual (*Peter*). Peter did not forget the ***“rock from which”*** he was ***“hewn, “and to the hole of the pit from which he was dug”*** (Isa 51:1). Nor, indeed, did he forget the gracious change wrought in him by the Lord Jesus. The name ***“Simon”*** means ***“God has heard,”*** depicting a sense of desperation and weakness. ***“Peter”*** means ***“rock,”*** reflecting the spiritual solidity and reliability produced by the grace of Christ. Peter writes as one who has been delivered, raised, and transformed. He has himself tasted of the Lord.

He continues to follow this form of reasoning in the phrase, ***“a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ.”*** Some versions (KNJV, NASB) use the term ***“bond-servant,”*** which emphasizes total devotion to the one being served. In the kingdom of God, such servanthood is always willing, and never the result of being coerced. Foreshadowing servitude to Christ, the Israelites of old were allowed to ***“buy a Hebrew servant”*** – to pay a sum for the slave (Ex 21:2). In this manner God signified the price by which Christ has purchased those who serve Him (1 Cor 6:20; 1 Cor 7:23). When the heart is persuaded of this gracious purchase, it yields unreserved obeisance to the Lord—a willing servant! Peter here completely identifies with those to whom he ministers.

Peter was first a ***“servant,”*** then an ***“Apostle,”*** a posture Paul also assumed (Rom 1:1; Tit 1:1). Even above that, this is the attitude first shown in our blessed Lord, Whom God confessed to be His ***“Servant”*** (Isa 42:1; 49:6; 52:13; Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Zech 3:8). Christ’s absolute commitment to serving His Father is disclosed in His words, ***“just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”*** (Matt 20:28; Mk 10:45). Thus did our Lord set the tone for labor.

Peter did not flaunt his Apostolic office, even though it is ***“first”*** in the church (1 Cor 12:28). His power would be in his words, not in an office, as ordinarily conceived. From the standpoint of political authority, Jesus declared His servants occupied the same ground. ***“But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren . . . Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ”*** (Matt 23:8,10). Notwithstanding, Peter’s words have power because they are undergirded by the Apostolic office. They are relevant because spoken by a kindred spirit, plucked from a state of condemnation by the grace of Christ. We do well to pay close heed to his words.

### OBTAINED LIKE PRECIOUS FAITH

***“To those who have obtained like precious faith with us . . .”*** (NKJV). ***“To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours . . .”*** (RSV). Here is one of the pivotal declarations of Scripture! The ***“faith”*** of which he speaks is *trust or reliance*, and must be possessed if the individual is to ***“please God”*** (Heb 11:6). Peter makes this statement as an Apostle, inspired of God. He also does so as a seasoned Apostle, nearing the point of disembarkment from this ***“present evil world.”*** He is not arguing a theological position, but stating an unalterable fact. Faith is ***“obtained,”*** not produced by men. Those, for instance, who say faith is the result of *evidence and*

*reason* have not accurately stated the case. The evidence that we have is not seen, and valid spiritual reasoning is of a higher order. We have **“obtained”** faith! It was **“given”** to us to **“believe”** (Phil 1:29). The Holy Spirit said of Apollos, who was **“mighty in the Scriptures,”** that **“he greatly helped those who had believed through grace”** (Acts 18:27). A functioning measure, of faith is given to **“every man”** in Christ Jesus (Rom 12:3,6). Everything we have, including our faith, has come from God (1 Cor 4:7).

It should be evident to all that the nature of faith requires that it be given to us. It deals with One, and with matters, that are beyond this world. The Object of our faith is **“in heaven.”** If the Lord does not **“open”** our hearts to receive this gracious gift, we will never possess it (Acts 16:14). What is more, the **“natural man”** (which is all we have apart from a gift from God), **“does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”** (1 Cor 2:14). With faith, we see **“Him Who is invisible”** (Heb 11:27). Let no person suppose, therefore, their faith to be the product of their own doing!

The phrase **“like precious faith”** is an arresting one. Faith is obviously **“precious,”** giving us access to God, Christ, and the **“things of the Spirit of God.”** This is a favorite word of Peter, describing something of great functional value and unparalleled satisfaction. He calls faith **“precious”** (1 Pet 1:7), as well as the **“blood of Christ”** (1 Pet 1:19), Jesus Himself (1 Pet 2:4,6,7), and God’s promises (2 Pet 1:4). Our faith falls into that category!

But this is a different use of the term, even coming from a different word. The word used here means **EQUALLY** valuable, or of the **SAME** kind; i.e., **“LIKE precious faith.”** The NASB reads, **“a faith of the same kind as ours.”** The RSV reads, **“a faith of equal standing with ours,”** while the NIV reads, **“a faith as precious as ours.”** That is an engrossing consideration! The faith possessed by every believer is classed with that possessed by the Apostles themselves! It does not make us Apostles, because faith is **“by measure.”** There is, however, only **“ONE faith”** (Eph 4:5), and it is the one YOU possess in Christ Jesus. It is as effective for what you are appointed to do as that of the Apostles for what they were appointed to do.

Peter has no reservations about classing himself with all who are in Christ Jesus. He does not set himself above them, but with them. That is one of the marks of a godly person—one who has **“the mind of Christ.”** They know faith is effectual wherever it is found. The possessor of the faith, from this viewpoint is incidental. It is the faith itself that is the point.

### THROUGH THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

**“ . . . to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.”** How is it that we have obtained faith? Although our effort was integral to the process, was it the cause of it? Did faith come to us because of our research or logic? Peter, constrained by the Holy Spirit, goes straight to the heart of the matter. We **“obtained”** this equally precious faith **“THROUGH the righteousness of God AND our Savior Jesus Christ.”**

We are truly saved **“by GRACE through faith,”** but it is strictly within the confines of God’s righteousness. There is nothing about our salvation that is merely accommodating of the human condition. Salvation is itself a display, or declaration, of **the righteousness of God.** The Spirit powerfully affirms this in Romans 3:25-26. The public (seen of the world, and received in heaven) atonement of Jesus proved that God was righteous in passing over the sins committed before that atonement. It also demonstrated His righteousness in justifying those who believe in Jesus. Thus, salvation is **“for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus”** (Rom 3:26). This is a proclamation rarely heard in a time of shallow and off-center preaching. But it is at the very heart of things, as Peter here declares.

Speaking through Peter, the Spirit powerfully affirms the nature of the gift of faith. He does not say we obtained it in an act of Divine condescension. It was an expression of God’s uprightness, or righteousness. It was **RIGHT** for sin to be punished in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). It was **RIGHT** for God to raise Him from the dead (Rom 1:4)! It was **RIGHT** for Him to seat Jesus at His own right hand with all power in heaven and earth (1 Pet 3:22). It is **RIGHT** that Jesus should be appointed to judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31). **AND, IT IS RIGHT THAT GOD SHOULD GIVE US FAITH!** From the standpoint of our experience, we **“believed through grace”** (Acts 18:27). But from the perspective of correctness, we **“obtained”** it **“through the righteousness of God,”** or **BECAUSE** He is righteous!

Peter adds one further facet to the shining jewel of a received faith. Not only was it through the **“righteousness of God,”** but also through the **“righteousness”** of our **“Savior Jesus Christ.”** The rightness of faith being given to us is traced back to Jesus Christ. The actual bestowment of it is accomplished by Christ, the **“one Mediator between God and man”** (1 Tim 2:5). What is even more, in the giving of faith, Christ is acting **righteously** as well as graciously. No aspect of the Law, or of the Divine nature, has been contradicted in us **“obtaining like precious faith!”**

If the obtaining of faith is itself an exhibition of the righteousness of God and Christ then it will be honored in heaven. Faith is not effective because of some mystical power within it. Its potency is owing to its recognition in heaven. We possess faith because God was acting righteously in giving it to us. It justifies and empowers because Jesus granted it to us righteously and justly. The due consideration of this single verse will open staggering vistas of truth to the soul, enabling the individual to overcome the world.

## LESSON #2

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*“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue” (2 Pet 2:2-3, NKJV).*

### INTRODUCTION

The Holy Spirit always speaks in strict harmony with the Divine agenda. When He refers to what God has given, it goes without saying, the gift is what is **needed by us**. What is more, it is a requirement for the **fulfillment** of God’s *“eternal purpose.”* There is no mere novelty in Scripture. We *“live by EVERY Word of God”* (Luke 4:4). Here is the heart of relevancy, the kernel of necessity, and the crux of spiritual life. In our text we find what we **need**, its **Source**, and the appointed **means** through which it is obtained. These things have been provided by the loftiest aspects of our God’s Person. They are aggressive expressions of His character. The primary Persons are God and Jesus, and the focus of their attention is the body of Christ. ALL of the needed resources have been supplied, not *some* of them, and they are ALL within the reach of those for whom they have been supplied.

### THE MULTIPLICATION OF GRACE and PEACE

*“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.”* Peter began his first epistle with a similar expression. *“Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied”* (1 Pet 1:1). Jude also verbalized this desire. *“Mercy unto you, and peace and love, be multiplied”* (Jude 2). Here, then, is a matter at the heart of our salvation! It is also at the center of human requirement. What is necessary is specified, together with the measure in which it is supplied, and the means through which it is appropriated.

**GRACE** speaks of God’s *favor*. It has to do with Divine *mercy, kindness, and goodwill. Approval, regard, and esteem* are in this word! God’s *preference* is found in this term. Here is an abundant overflow of Divine love, lavished upon individuals of His *choice* and upon whom His smile *rests*. We are justified *“by His grace”* (Rom 3:24), having been made accepted in the Son (Eph 1:6). In Christ, God’s grace is characterized by *“exceeding riches”* (Eph 2:7). This copiousness is characteristic of God, *“abounding”* toward us (Rom 5:15). Undeserved–YES!–yet, because of Christ’s atonement, lavished upon us willingly and intentionally. We are *“saved by grace”* (Eph 2:8), an expression denoting God’s fervent desire to do so! From beginning to end, salvation is *“by grace”*—in strict accord with God’s preference, desire, and intention. His will and His heart are aggressively involved in our salvation.

**PEACE** addresses the impact of Divine love upon us. Here is the calming of the effects of a consciousness of sin. The conviction wrought by the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11) unsettles the human spirit, breaking the stony heart. Peace is the remedy for that condition. It keeps watch over the heart like a mighty and eagle-eyed sentinel (Phil 4:7). This is not a peace like the world gives. It so dominates that the heart is not troubled and the person is not afraid—a most remarkable condition (John 14:27). This peace is primarily between the individual and God (Rom 5:1), Who is over all.

These indispensable blessings are *“multiplied”* to us. That is, there is no end to their supply—no point at which they will become inadequate or unavailable. The term *“multiply”* is not primarily mathematical. It denotes unending and copious supply. Synonyms are *“abound,”* flourish, overflow, spread, or increase. Grace and peace do not merely get us into the Kingdom. They both continue to increase. The abundance of Divine availabilities is scarcely known among professing believers. It need not be so! The abounding nature of salvation is proclaimed with great power (Rom 5:20; 15:13; 2 Cor 1:5; 9:8; Eph 1:8; Phil 4:17). At no point is salvation associated with scarcity!

THE MEANS through which this abundant supply is realized is the *“knowledge of God and of Jesus.”* Our personal intimacy with Deity is the context in which abounding grace and peace are received. Here is an area (knowing God) that is to be noted for its **INCREASE** (Col 1:10). In this knowledge we receive *“the spirit of wisdom and revelation”* (Rev 1:17); i.e., we begin to see things from the Divine perspective. The more aware you are of God and Christ, the more grace and peace you receive. Your familiarity with the Lord is the highway upon which heavenly supplies are sent to you—and they come in copious and satisfying quantities!

### WHAT DIVINE POWER HAS GIVEN TO US

*“His Divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness . . .”* Here is a most wonderful thought. The word *“Divine”* is sometimes translated *“Godhead,”* or *“Deity”* (Acts 17:29). It can be translated *“Deity”* or *“Divine nature.”* Here is an aspect of salvation we must grasp. Christ Jesus laid down His life as the *“Son of Man,”* being *“crucified through weakness”* (2 Cor 13:4). In His vicarious death, the Lord Jesus sheathed His Deity, laying down His life as an atonement for sin. Further, He intercedes for us, mediating the New Covenant, as *“the Man Christ Jesus,”* able to be *“touched with the feeling of our infirmities”* (2 Tim 2:5; Heb 4:15). His identity with fallen humanity produces these glorious realities.

However, in the provision of salvational resources, God acted out of His Godhood. Here is an expression of the Divine Nature! *“Divine power”* is objective power—it serves Divine purpose. It is authority that cannot be obviated by the enemy. What this power supplies cannot be removed by the devil! Such provisions as are

given by **“Divine power”** will always be accessible to faith. They will not grow old or prove inadequate. They are precisely adapted to our condition, undergirded by Omnipotence, and furnished out of Divine desire! Their supply springs from eternity.

What plentitude has been provided by this **“Divine power!”** **“ALL THINGS THAT PERTAIN TO LIFE AND GODLINESS!”** Not *some things*, but **“ALL things!”** There are no spiritual supplies anywhere else! History, science, and philosophy are all impotent to provide anything having to do with **“life and godliness!”** They are all broken cisterns that can hold no water (Jer 2:13), and bags filled with holes (Haggai 1:6). If God has supplied **“all things”** having to do with **“life and godliness,”** neither man nor angel will be able to find a solitary spiritual resource elsewhere! Those who boast they have found spiritual secrets other places are not telling the truth!

Notice the areas of need—**“life and godliness.”** If God has supplied things concerning these areas, it is because they are needed. **Nature is paralyzed and unproductive in the spiritual realm!** **“LIFE”** is spiritual live-being **“alive to God”** (Rom 6:11). This is **“fellowship”** with the Son (1 Cor 1:9), walking **“in the light”** (1 John 1:7), living **“by faith”** (Heb 10:38) and walking **“in the Spirit”** (Gal 5:16,25). It is an acute awareness of, and sensitivity to, the Living God. **“GODLINESS”** is holiness, piety, devotion, or godly living. It is the expression of spiritual life in godly thoughts, words, and deeds. This is Divine life lived out in the people of God. Without this quality, **“no man shall see the Lord”** (Heb 12:14).

Vital union with God and Christ, and living a godly life are accomplished by appropriating Divine supplies—**“ALL things”** God has **“given to us”** out of His **“Divine power.”** What He has given is appropriated by your faith. Without those resources, neither life nor godliness are possible—and they have been supplied in abundance! If professed believers are not in vital union with God, and if they are not living godly in Christ Jesus, it is because they have not availed themselves of what God has **“given.”** All such are **“in the flesh,”** and living in a state of practical alienation, profession notwithstanding.

### THE MEANS OF APPROPRIATION

**“ . . . through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.”** **“All things pertaining to life and godliness”** are appropriated the same way as the multiplication of grace and peace! **The circumstance of Divine fellowship and intimacy is the place of appropriation!** Knowing God, which is **“eternal life”** (John 17:3), is not only a **“gift”** (Rom 6:23), it is the appointed means of obtaining Divine resources.

There is a heavenly logic to this required circumstance. Notice, God has called us **“by His glory and virtue.”** This phrase is translated in a variety of ways by various translations. **“His own glory and excellence”** (NASB, RSV), **“glory and goodness”** (NRSV, NIV), **“glory and worthiness”** (YLT). The idea is that **the most glorious and beneficent attributes of God constrained our calling—the summons to involvement with Himself.** He has poured Himself into every aspect of our salvation! To Moses He revealed His afterglow, or **“back”** (Ex 33:23). The Law itself contained a foreshadowing, or type, of glorious things to come (Col 2:17; Heb 10:1). Both the afterglow and the type were vague, lacking the clarity revealed in Christ Jesus. But this is not how God has **now** made Himself known! We were not **“called”** by an afterglow of the Divine Presence, or by a mere introduction to coming things! We were called by God’s **“glory and virtue”**—by a more thorough exposure to His Person and purpose **“in the FACE of Christ Jesus”** (2 Cor 4:6). **The best and most extensive revelation of God is found in our calling.**

This being the case, availing ourselves of this call will bring to us the best God has to offer—**“all things pertaining to life and godliness.”** Make sure of this: those who live in aloofness from the Living God will obtain nothing pertaining to life and godliness! Those who live close to the world, maintaining a dominantly worldly perspective have, by that very posture, forfeited what they need to live unto God and be godly! Such things cannot be obtained by religious disciplines, seasonable bursts of supposed spirituality, or fulfilling official religious responsibilities! In my candid opinion, this eliminates the validity of the majority of contemporary religion.

From beginning to end, our salvation depends upon conscious involvement with God through Christ Jesus. As God becomes distant to us, the required resources extend beyond our reach. As we draw near to Him with a true heart, the resources become more accessible to us. As the world looms larger than all else, things required for life and godliness fade into the background, and are no longer considered. When heaven becomes dominant, and we seek a better country, the required resources come more clearly into view. At no point will God allow Himself to be excluded from our salvation.

This is why we are urged to set our **“affection on things above, and not on things on the earth”** (Col 3:1-3). This is more than a Divine demand—although it is surely that! Salvation, by its very nature, requires this posture. Without it, what we need to make it safely through this world cannot be obtained. **If we do not walk with God, we cannot receive from Him!** The good things we need so desperately are dispensed within the **“holiest”** place. Therefore, we are urged to confidently enter into it (Heb 10:22).

## LESSON #3

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*“ . . . glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet 2:4, NKJV).*

### INTRODUCTION

There is a perceptive aspect of faith that is imperative if we are to live acceptably in this world, and adequately prepare for the world to come. *“By faith we understand . . . ,”* the Scripture affirms (Heb 11:3). But faith must have a word—a Divine commitment. Faith will ground itself upon what is said and done outside of ourselves. Thus, *“faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God”* (Rom 10:17). Peter has already reminded us our faith was *“obtained,”* and that through the righteousness of God. Now He will give our faith something to grasp—something that will enable us to lay hold on eternal life, and effectively resist our adversary, the devil. Moved by the Holy Spirit, Peter will now proclaim the appointed means of participating in the Divine Nature. As with all Gospel declarations, faith is to take hold of this word, appropriating what is affirmed to belong to the saved!

### EXCEEDING GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES

*“ . . . glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises.”* The promises of God are expressions of His nature—His *“glory and virtue,”* or *“glory and goodness.”* Here is a declaration of what He **WANTS** to do! Compare this with the dastardly deed of Herod, who had John the Baptist beheaded. He did NOT want to do it, but was coerced into it by his wicked wife (Matt 14:9-11). Think, too, of Pilate, who crucified Jesus at the behest of the people, even though he drew back from it personally (John 18:38-39). The promises of God, however, are an overflow of God’s gracious Spirit—a provision that comes from His heart.

But these are not ordinary promises—as though God were capable of giving ordinary promises. They are *“exceeding great and precious.”* Other translations read *“precious and magnificent”* (NASB), *“very great and precious”* (NIV), *“the greatest and precious”* (Darby’s), *“great rewards highly to be valued”* (BBE). Such provisions must not be ignored.

**EXCEEDINGLY GREAT.** The greatness of these promises exceeds all that was before them. They are greater than the promises shouted from Mount Gerizim (Deut 28:1-14). Those were ALL promises of earthly prosperity—not a word about eternal life, the world to come, the remission of sins, or the gift of the Holy Spirit! What we now have is a *“better covenant established upon better promises”* (Heb 8:6). Too, these promises transcend all the world had to offer. The very best the world presents is meager and worthless when compared with what God has promised. Those who see this gladly *“deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,”* in preference of the promises of God. God has promised strength (2 Cor 12:9; Eph 3:16; 1 Pet 5:10), personal fellowship (John 14:21,23; 2 Cor 6:17-18), the subduing of the devil (Rom 16:20), and an “eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15). Believing those promises constrains us.

**PRECIOUS PROMISES.** These promises have a value of their own—not a comparative worth. They are not precious because they are scarce—like precious stones or gold. They are precious because of their impact upon those embracing them. They have a transforming power in them, as we will see. A precious stone will not change you. It will not improve your character, or give you strength—but **the promises of God will!** Everyone of them is like a precious jewel! They are because *“all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us”* (2 Cor 1:20). They do not have an historical greatness, like the Constitution of the United States. Their preciousness is owing to their connection with God Almighty! Every one of these promises, in Christ, is accompanied with the Divine shout, **“YES!”**—this is for you! In the bosom of the Son—in fellowship with Him (1 Cor 1:9)—the promises come true! And the **“AMEN”** of satisfaction is shouted back by us to the glory of God! Too, they are **“Amen”** in the sense of being finalized in Christ Jesus.

All of these promises have been **“given”** to us—given to be obtained. They are more to be appropriated than analyzed, and are adapted to our situation in the world. God has given them because He desired to do so, and not only because we required them. You can obtain them! They are for you!

### PARTICIPATION IN THE DIVINE NATURE

*“ . . . that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature.”* The *“exceeding great and precious promises”* are functional—they are not spiritual museum pieces or novelties. The revealed purpose of the promises will challenge the best of minds, and strengthen the weakest of hearts. They have been given in order that we might *“be partakers of the divine nature.”* The NASB reads, *“become participants of the divine nature,”* and the NIV reads *“you may participate in the divine nature.”* Here, the vast gulf between **“true religion”** and false religion is seen. In heathen religions, there is a vast chasm between the people and their god. In Christ, that separation is not only powerfully addressed, it is dramatically removed. The saved actually partake of God’s nature! Praise the Lord!

It is affirmed that we are *“partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end”* (Heb 3:14). The idea is that we **“SHARE”** in His Person (NIV). This is another view of regeneration—

being made **“a new creation”** (2 Cor 5:17). Participation in the Divine Nature involves Divine qualities being found in us—the **“fruit of the Spirit”** (Gal 5:22-23). The people of God come to possess **“the mind of Christ”** (1 Cor 2:16; Phil 2:5), and embrace the **“Spirit of Christ”** (Rom 8:14). The **peace** we possess is Christ’s (John 14:27), as well as the **joy** we own (John 15:11). In the end, when the Lord comes, **“we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is”** (1 John 3:1-2). There is participation in the ultimate.

How is this glorious participation accomplished? How do we become like Christ? How can His Nature be found in us? Some suppose it is by Law—by the imposition of commandments that are actually against the nature of the people. But this is not so! There are commandments, but they are no longer grievous to us or against us (1 John 5:3; Col 2:14). Righteousness, or the state of being like God, does not come through the Law (Rom 3:21; Gal 2:21; Phil 3:9). Others suppose conformity comes through discipline, but they too are wrong, for discipline cannot produce a hatred for sin (Col 2:20-23)!

The promises of God are the appointed means of being brought together with God and Christ! That is another way of saying the process is **“by faith.”** As we fasten upon what God has promised, preferring that above all else, the Lord draws near to us, declaring His secret to us, and showing us His covenant (Psa 25:14). Too, transformations takes place when we are close to the Lord. Just as Moses’ face took on Divine attributes when He was near God, so our character is transformed by nearness to the Lord (2 Cor 3:7-18; 4:6). There will be no transformation or moral change at a distance from God.

This means that the **“exceeding great and precious promises”** can bring us into a profound acquaintance with God Himself. That have both drawing and transforming power, which the Law did not have. The Law was accurate, but it was not effective, being **“weak through the flesh”** (Rom 8:3). Also, faith had nothing to do with the Law (Gal 3:12). The promises, however, are both accurate and effective. Too, faith can take hold of them, for they are addressed to faith. These promises are to be pursued, believed, and embraced. God uses them to make us like Himself, through Christ and by the Spirit!

### ESCAPING THE WORLD’S CORRUPTION

**“ . . . having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”** Participating in the Divine nature necessarily involves an escape from the corruption, or deteriorating quality, of the world. What we have here is two sides of the coin of redemption. Both sides are accomplished by means of the **“exceeding great and precious promises.”** Some versions make this more clear. **“Thus He has given us, through these things, His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the Divine Nature”** (NRSV). The idea here is **NOT**, *Escape the corruption that is in the world, then you will have access to the transforming promises.* Rather, the sense of the text is, *The promises of God will enable you to escape the pollution of the world so that you can participate in the Divine nature.* You must first escape the polluting world!

By saying, **“HAVING escaped . . . ,”** the Spirit affirms that transformation can only take place outside of the world order! As Israel had to get out of Egypt in order to get into Canaan, so the believer must get outside of the world’s influence in order to have Christ **“formed”** within (Gal 4:19). Although this requirement is virtually unknown in the modern church, it is an absolute Kingdom necessity. Since everything that is in the world is **“not of the Father”** (1 John 2:16), no Divine fellowship or sustenance can take place unless we are separate from it.

The question is, How can this **“escape”** be accomplished? Again, it is by means of the **“exceeding great and precious promises”** of God! The promises give us a reason to leave the world order. We have been called **“to inherit a blessing”** (1 Pet 3:9). The persuasion of that blessing enables us to escape the otherwise inescapable world! In His first Epistle, Peter affirmed we have been born again in order to obtain **“an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven”** for us (1 Pet 1:4). The conviction of the reality and obtainability of that inheritance enables our escape from the world order.

When Peter called upon those who had murdered Jesus to turn from the world order, he constrained them with a promise: **“and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”** (Acts 2:38). When Paul called upon the Philippian jailor to leave the world order, he gave him a promise: **“and you shall be saved”** (Acts 16:31). To the slipping Corinthians, Paul urged them to come away from unclean things, giving them the promise of God: **“I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty”** (2 Cor 6:17-18). Over and over, this approach is affirmed in Scripture. The promises of God have effective drawing power.

It is true, we **MUST** escape the pollution of the world, else we will be destroyed with it. There are awesome Divine threats to constrain such a departure. But for those with tender heart, the promises of God will provoke an escape accompanied with **“songs and everlasting joy”** (Isa 35:10). Those promises are why the Word can be **“gladly received”** (Acts 2:41). They move us on the Canaan, so to speak, and do not leave us stranded in the wilderness, as unbelief left the Israelites. Thank God for His precious promises!

## LESSON #4

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

*“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (2 Pet 1:5-8, NKJV).

### INTRODUCTION

Peter does not take for granted that saints will grow automatically. He urges them to conscious involvement in the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Their faith is their primary possession, but in its energy they are to appropriate for themselves spiritual graces that will make them productive in Christ's Kingdom. For those in Christ, barrenness and unfruitfulness is lethal! Those who yield no fruit to God will not be permitted to remain in the Vine. In order to ensure a productive spiritual life, the Spirit now informs us of graces that mix well with faith, supporting it and providing avenues through which it can express itself to the glory of God. These are all key characteristics. Salvation provides fully for their addition in our lives. They can also ABOUND in us. With great zeal, we are to appropriate them.

### FOR THIS REASON, BE DILIGENT!

*“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith . . .”* The *“very reason”* to which he refers is the *“exceeding great and precious promises”* through which we become *“partakers of the Divine nature.”* These promises—great in scope and profound in their effects—should provoke a hearty effort in every believer. The only way to avoid this effect is to neglect the promises, placing them aside in preference for the things of this world. **The catalyst of the Kingdom is ALWAYS something God has said or provided!** If you want Kingdom effects, you must use Kingdom means! As elementary as that may appear, the church is plagued with novices, and even charlatans, who attempt to motivate and constrain the people of God through carnal means. This is not to be allowed among us.

Notice the language employed by the Spirit: *“GIVING all diligence.”* This is a part of OURSELVES that we put into the matter at hand. There is no room for mere routine here, or perfunctory observance. Diligence is something that has to be *“GIVEN”* by the believer—it is something that flows from the heart, and does so with consistency. The word translated *“giving”* literally means *to bear in alongside, i.e. introduce simultaneously; i.e., bring every effort to, do one's very best, try very hard.* The idea is that **as soon as we hear these promises**, we are to wholly invest ourselves in their appropriation. The idea of **immediacy** is unquestionably in this word.

Too, we are not to immediately yield only SOME diligence, or a measure of it, but *“ALL diligence.”* Here again is a Kingdom trait. We love God with *“ALL”* of our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matt 22:37-38). When we engage in spiritual warfare, we employ *“ALL prayer”* (Eph 6:). When filled with *“joy and peace”* it is with *“ALL joy and peace”* (Rom 15:13). It is with *“ALL knowledge”* that we are to be filled (Rom 15:14). The *“fruit of the Spirit is in ALL goodness and righteousness and truth”* (Eph 5:19). If there is a single telling mark of vain religion, it is that it is willing to settle for *“some,”* at best, but never for *“all.”* We are part of an *“ALL”* economy!

In our text, faith is assumed—that is the beginning point. The Spirit has already witnessed that we have *“obtained like precious faith.”* However, that faith is not an end of itself, but a means to an end. It is like a fountain from which, if not clogged by carnality, many graces spring. Faith is the beginning point for every increase in the believer. Faith is the root, and the things we are to add are the branches. They are primary areas of activity for our faith.

The promises of God are calculated to set the virtues to be considered before us, and faith will persuade us they are accessible. Augustine was right in saying *“faith is the root and mother of all virtues.”* It is carrying the melody of salvation. Now we are required to summon the full chorus of virtues into the hymn of praise to our God! There is a progression in these virtues—each one growing out of the preceding one, so to speak. It is possible to press this matter too far, but you will see the principle as we progress. There is a glorious harmony and integration to spiritual life that causes it to bring us great joy as we walk in the Spirit. Whereas sin brings confusion and disorientation, these activities produce spiritual solidity.

### AN ADDITION IS TO BE MADE

*“. . . add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.”* The first addition is *“VIRTUE,”* also translated *“goodness”* (NRSV, NIV), and

“*moral excellence*” (NASB). The idea of *manliness*, or quitting like men (1 Cor 16:13) is inherent in the word. “*Moral excellence*” means the individual can be trusted to make the right choice, and to stand in the midst of opposition. Resolute determination is in this virtue.

In the energy of virtue, “**KNOWLEDGE**” is to be supplied, or added. This is experiential involvement in the Kingdom. It is the development of a genuine acquaintance with both the nature and benefits of the Kingdom. It involves a preference and love for the truth, which sanctifies (John 17:17,19). This is “*spiritual understanding*” that comes from fellowship with Christ (Col 1:9; 1 Cor 1:9). It includes familiarity with God and His purpose.

Out of our spiritual knowledge we are to add “**TEMPERANCE**,” or self control. This is keeping under our bodies, bringing them into subjection (1 Cor 9:27). It involves the crucifixion of the flesh (Gal 5:24) and not quenching the Holy Spirit. This is accomplished willingly, and not as a matter of mere lifeless discipline. Temperance is something fervently desired.

Working through our temperance, or self control, faith will enable the addition of “**PATIENCE**,” or endurance. It is only as we control the impulses of the flesh, being led of the Spirit, that we develop endurance. This, like the other virtues, is requisite to completing our race. The promises, you will recall, are inherited through “*faith and patience*” (Heb 6:12).

In our patience, we are to supply “**GODLINESS**,” or “*holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*” (Heb 12:14). Godliness is not simply abstaining from immoral deeds, and engaging in virtuous ones. It is “**DENYING ungodliness and worldly lusts**,” and living “*soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world*” (Tit 2:12). It is nothing less that partaking of the Divine nature. It refuses to give a place to Satan or sin.

Out of godliness, we are to add “**BROTHERLY KINDNESS**.” The RSV translates this “*brotherly affection*,” while the NIV says “*mutual affection*.” The idea is that of a preference for the household of faith, to which we have been added by God’s grace. The Lord Jesus resides among this society, and our attitude toward it depicts our attitude toward Him (Matt 25:34-40). This is not fulfilled by a sectarian preference! We choose to dwell where Jesus is.

In brotherly kindness, or affection, we are to add “**CHARITY**,” or “*love*.” This is a love that does “*good to all men, especially they of the household of faith*” (Gal 6:10). This is a love that involves conscious choice and devotion. It includes affection, but goes much further. It is also intelligent, involving a determination to bless, benefit, and assist. This is Divine love expressed through the human spirit.

These become facets of our character, and are only possible to those who have obtained faith. What is more, they are not optional, nor are they luxuries. They are the appointed means of Divine fellowship.

## THE SECRET TO ABOUNDING IN FRUIT

“*For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Fruitfulness is an essential part of spiritual life. Where it is not found, the Father Himself removes the individual from Christ (John 15:2). Through the Spirit, Peter tells us how an abundance of spiritual fruit can be found in us.

Fruit actually is produced indirectly! As we give our attention to adding the qualities just mentioned, THEY make us productive: i.e., “*they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful*” (KJV); “*they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge*” (RSV); “*they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive*” (NIV). If we dwell in the heavenly places, we will not be barren! If the things that can be “**added**” ABOUND our persons, we will not be unfruitful. That is God’s promise!

Implicit in this text is the idea that barrenness and unfruitfulness will disqualify the individual from Divine fellowship. They are conditions that must be overcome, else condemnation is sure. Nature will tolerate barrenness and unfruitfulness, but grace will not! One of the meanings of “**barren**” is USELESS—serving no purpose, vain, worthless, pointless and meaningless! The very idea jars the senses of the soul! Unfruitfulness is possessing nothing of benefit to God Himself, and is depicted in the barren fig tree which Jesus cursed (Mark 11:13-14). **THE ADDITION OF and ABUNDANCE OF virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly affection, and love will keep us from this cursed condition!**

Some may, in the assessment of their fruitfulness, become discouraged because of a lack of institutionally-defined fruit. The Holy Spirit defines the area in which fruitfulness is realized: “*in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Blessed and sanctifying truth! This is nothing less than “*eternal life*” (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20)—becoming more thoroughly acquainted with the our Savior! Consider this truth from a more practical point of view. *A fruitful believer is seeing more of Christ Jesus than he/she did before. The things of God are making more sense to such a person. There is a profound delight in Jesus Christ, and less mystery about Him. A fervent quest to participate in His life, sufferings, and power dominates the heart. A greater gulf exists between the person and the world, and a lesser distance is found between such an one and the Savior. Heaven looms larger, and earth becomes smaller. A determination to “dwell in the house of the Lord forever” dominates the heart. What Jesus has for us is seen as treasure.*

Remember, Peter has defined “*the knowledge of God*” as the means through which grace and peace are multiplied (1:2). Everything having to do with life and godliness is supplied through this knowledge (1:3). Later, he will

tell us we escape the contamination of the world through it (2:20). In this section he informs us this will not be accomplished independently of our character—which cannot be formed without our effort. **If we appropriate what God provides, and it ABOUNDS in us, we will become what God has determined!** The graces mentioned are the means to spiritual wealth for us, and blessedness for our God. They are all within the reach of our faith!

## LESSON #5

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

*“For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.”* (2 Pet 1:9, NKJV).

### INTRODUCTION

A condition in which the spiritual qualities mentioned in this text are missing, is a most serious one. An institutional church can tolerate constituents without these virtues, because they are not integral to its supposed success. However, this is not the case in the Kingdom of God. There are no gifts or virtues that are incidental, luxuries, or for show. Everything that is provided in Christ Jesus *“pertains to”* or is NEEDED FOR, *life and godliness.* Because of this, spiritual growth is actually becoming what God has appointed—or being *“conformed to the image of His Son.”* Those who are not growing in Christ, or are stagnant, are actually out of the will of God, living in the flesh, and tottering on the brink of eternal ruin. That gravity of this perception has such an effect upon the soul that it separates the individual from all mediocre and heartless religion.

### HE WHO LACKS THESE THINGS

*“He who lacks these things . . .”* There is an aura in contemporary religion that is of deep concern to me. It has been saturated with psychological perceptions that have robbed the souls of men and corrupted their view of the Kingdom of God. *“Christians”* are viewed from a worldly perspective rather than a spiritual one. Their psychological profile, emotional needs, and fleshly distinctions have gained remarkable prominence. This has constrained men to view the qualities just reviewed quite differently than the Holy Spirit of God.

The character-traits that have been mentioned in this text are NEEDED for *“life and godliness.”* They are requisite to being godly, and to maintaining Divine fellowship. Yet, the modern church does not perceive this to be the case. Identity with the institution, and a hearty support of it, are quite sufficient to maintain acceptance. *“Virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love,”* are signs of magnificent advance in such churches. **The Spirit, however, presents them as indications of godliness and spiritual life in the body of Christ!**

Notice how the Spirit speaks. The individual in whom they are not found is said to *“lack”* them. The NIV says such a person *“does not have them.”* This is more than an informational phrase: i.e., *so-and-so does not have them, while others do.* **The comparison is not between the person who has them and the person who does not!** Rather, an acceptable state is being compared with an UNACCEPTABLE one. A normal spiritual condition is being contrasted with an ABNORMAL one. What we should be is being differentiated from what we should NOT be! In the world, a person who *“lacks”* is sometimes the victim of hardship and difficulty. His condition is not the result of neglect or indifference. That is not what we have here.

Everything about the Kingdom is conducive to the addition of these qualities. They have been provided for God. They are appropriated through the knowledge of God, which is possessed by *“all . . . from the least to the greatest”* (Heb 8:11). The new nature desires and enjoys them. The life of faith requires them. They are all within our grasp. God expects them to be in us. When they are *“lacking”* spiritual growth is impossible.

For this reason, the Spirit will not speak kindly of the absence of these things. God has given us faith, in an expression of His righteousness (2 Pet 1:1). Grace and peace have been multiplied unto us (1:2). In His Divine power, our God has given us everything required to be godly and alive to Him (1:3). Transcendent and precious promises have been given to us as a means of participating in the Divine nature (1:4). The areas of concentration have been specified with remarkable clarity (1:5-8). None of these provisions are appropriated by Law, or by works. All are given by grace and obtained by faith. It simply is not possible to have a more favorable circumstance.

How is it, then, that anyone professing identity with Christ could lack these virtues? And, who is the person who would dare to justify such a condition? The Spirit will now provide the true condition of those who *“lack”* what God has provided. Let us take them into our hearts with zeal.

### BLIND AND SHORTSIGHTED

*“ . . . is blind, and cannot see afar off . . . ”* (KJV). How is it that a person can be *“blind”* and nearsighted at the same time? Spiritually, the idea is that a person cannot see what is right before them, nor can they see what is coming. In nature, blindness is abnormal. Most of the people can see, and a relatively few are blind. But in the professed church, the condition appears to have been reversed. Most of the people are blind, and a few can see.

Keep in mind, the new birth does not begin with blindness; it begins with sight. As it is written, *“I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light . . .”* (Acts 26:18). *“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened . . .”* (Heb 6:4). *“But call to remembrance the former*

*days, in which, after ye were illuminated . . .*” (Heb 10:32). The blazing light that penetrates the heart, enabling the individual to perceive spiritual realities, is declared in 2 Corinthians 4:6. **“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”** Every child of God is reborn this way—SEEING!

How is it that blindness could again envelop the soul? It is by failing to appropriate what God has given for **“life and godliness.”** Spiritual life must be maintained! Feeding is essential! Growth is imperative! Note, the Spirit does NOT say the person lacking these qualities WILL BECOME blind, but that he IS blind! Such are reduced to the spiritually impoverished state of the Laodicean church (Rev 3:17). God and Jesus cannot be seen as they are. The Scriptures cannot be comprehended. The world is not seen as it really is. Such an individual has NO advantage in life or in death! The promises of God obtain no real importance, and the powerful Gospel of Christ is seen, at best, as a mere doctrinal position. Such blindness is malignant and terminal!

The person lacking these things **“cannot see afar off,”** or is **“shortsighted.”** Although the **“coming of the Lord draweth nigh”** (James 5:8), he cannot see it coming. Even though **“the end of all things is at hand”** (1 Pet 4:7), such nearsighted people cannot see it approaching. Death itself is imminent (Heb 9:27), but their thoughts exclude such a consideration. The future is bringing the a day **“in the which God will judge the world in righteousness”** (Acts 17:31), but they cannot see it. Their minds do not dwell upon these realities because they **“cannot see afar off.”** It is not because they have not heard about these things, but because they have not **“added”** in faith what God has provided for **“life and godliness.”**

The person who **“cannot see afar off”** places little value upon the **“exceeding great and precious promises”** of God. Having right to the tree of life (Rev 22:14), being gathered to the Lord (2 Thess 2:1), and reigning with Christ (2 Tim 2:12) are not the subjects of contemplation because they cannot be seen. They appear to have no relevance to the individual, and are viewed as *pie in the sky* **bye and bye**. Those who **“cannot see afar off”** do not anticipate the resurrection (Phil 3:11), judging man and angels (1 Cor 6:1-2), or being given **“power over the nations”** (Rev 2:26-27). This condition is an unspeakable handicap from which recovery is imperative!

### WHEN CLEANSING IS FORGOTTEN

**“. . . and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.”** The essentiality of remembering the removal of our sins is seen in the observance of the Lord’s Supper. There, frequency of focused remembrance occurs among us, giving us the advantage in the good fight of faith. It is there that Christ’s death for sin is shown, or proclaimed (1 Cor 11:24-26). The recollection and statement of that death stirs the memory, recalling the remission of sins and the cleansing of the soul. (1 Cor 6:11; Heb 10:22; Rev 1:5). This was nothing less than recalling the **“washing of regeneration”** (Tit 3:5), when we were **“delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son”** (Col 1:13).

The Spirit admonished the Ephesians to **“remember”** the condition from which they had been delivered—a hopeless and helpless one (Eph 2:11-12). The Corinthians were also reminded of the depths of depravity from which they were delivered (1 Cor 6:10-11). Isaiah summoned the ancient people to recall **“the hole of the pit whence ye are digged”** (Isa 51:1). The Lord reminded David, **“I took thee from the shepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel”** (2 Sam 7:8). Paul remembered what he was before the Lord delivered him. **“Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief”** (1 Tim 1:13).

The lively remembrance of our cleansing will keep us from returning like a dog to the vomit of iniquity. When, however, the remission of our sins and the cleansing of our souls are forgotten, eternal things lose their relevance. Fighting the good fight of faith is not seen as vital, and obtaining the prize is not perceived as essential for the individual. The work of the Lord is not held in high regard, the Word of God is not seen as essential to life, and resisting the devil does not seem all that important. The soul is lulled into sleep when we forget we were purged from our old sins.

Here, the Spirit affirms that those who lack these graces, to be added in the energy of faith, have forgotten they were purged from their sins. That is why they have not added them! You will be hard pressed to find a church or an individual that will assess this condition in that way!

The contaminating effects of the **“natural man”** (1 Cor 2:14) and the **“carnal mind”** (Rom 8:7-8) must not be forgotten! Such influences brought us into death before, and they will do it again! They must be expelled from our churches, and refused entrance into educational institutions. When thinking becomes **“natural”** and **“carnal”** our former condemned state is forgotten, and Satan gains the advantage. What God has given, essential for our growth, will not be appropriated, and the curse of the Almighty will be incurred. It is not possible to overstate the criticality of this situation.

If any soul lacks these graces, the course of action is plain. Faith must be strengthened, and a solid recollection of deliverance must again dominate the heart and mind. In the energy of faith, driven by thanksgiving for salvation, we will appropriate what is required to be godly, and to maintain fellowship with the Living God through Christ Jesus, and by the Spirit.

## LESSON #6

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

*“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Pet 1:10-11, NKJV).*

### INTRODUCTION

The gravity of this text is found in the phrases *“even more,” “call and election,” “never stumble,”* and an *“entrance”* that is *“supplied.”* The great salvation that is in Christ Jesus is conducive to arduous activity. The promises it sets before us provokes such endeavor. The nature of salvation also contributes to this type of involvement. Wherever there is a lack of fervent quest for blessing, blindness and shortsightedness exist. In such cases, the individual has failed to appropriate *“all things pertaining to life and godliness.”* In this text, the place of KNOWING you have been *“called”* and elected is affirmed. Although both of these realities (*“calling”* and *“election”*) are debated in the religious community, the Spirit presses the issue of the personal awareness of them both. Truth is to be believed, blessings are to be received, and Divine provisions must be appropriated!

### BE EVEN MORE DILIGENT!

*“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure.”* The kingdom of our Lord and Savior is a realm of *“even more.”* From God, an abundance is supplied. On our part, diligence is to be found. Mediocrity has no place here, to say nothing of slothfulness and indifference, traits that dominate the contemporary church.

In view of the announcement that those lacking the mentioned spiritual virtues are *“blind and cannot see afar off,”* we are to be *“even more diligent.”* We are laboring to avoid spiritual blindness, for no progress in the faith can be made by the blind! This requires *“even more diligence,”* a picking up of the pace, as it were. The word “diligence” means *despatch, eagerness, earnestness, forwardness, and haste.* It is an aggressive word. Delay has no part in it, nor does a lack of hearty effort. If we are to avoid becoming spiritually blind, this is what must be done!

And what is it we are laboring to do? It is to *“make our calling and election sure,”* or to confirm it. What are these blessed privileges to be made sure? Our *“calling”* is the summons from heaven—the *“heavenly calling”* (Heb 3:1). This is what initiated our involvement with the Lord, for *“whom He predestined, these He also called”* (Rom 8:30). It was a *“holy calling”* (2 Tim 1:9) that impressed upon the soul God’s desire for our salvation. That call, when heeded, persuades the individual that God is *“for”* him, and has provided deliverance from Divine wrath. It was the invitation to the feast of salvation, prepared by God, and offered to those who *“have no money”* (Isa 55:1). Through this call we were summoned into the fellowship of God’s Son (1 Cor 1:9), and into His grace and spiritual liberty (Gal 1:6; 5:13).

Our *“election”* has to do with Divine choice and preference. We have been *“chosen”* in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:4), entirely apart from human merit, and because of Him. That choice was made *“through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth”* (2 Thess 2:13). This is truly an *“election of grace”* (Rom 11:5), constrained by the Divine intent to bless!

We do not make our *“calling and election”* sure to God, for He already *“knows them that are His”* (2 Tim 2:19). Our diligence makes these sure to *US!* In that assuredness we KNOW we have been called by God, and are chosen by Him, fully accepted in heaven. This is possible, as confirmed in Paul’s witness of the Thessalonians: *“knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God”* (1 Thess 1:4). We can know our standing with God!

The Spirit is speaking of spiritual confidence and assurance. This is what causes the child of God to shout, *“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one”* (1 John 5:19). Let us get straight to the point. **Spiritual blindness, which is lethal, cannot be averted while living in a state of uncertainty!** That confidence, however, is only realized in Kingdom pursuits—in our faith adding virtue, knowledge, . . . etc. Our participation in the Divine nature is what yields the indispensable fruit of *“the full assurance of hope”* (Heb 6:11). You have been seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6). Your appropriation of the benefits resident there will bring assurance of your calling and election.

### YOU WILL NEVER STUMBLE!

*“ . . . for if you do these things you will never stumble (‘fall,’ KJV).”* The word *“stumble,”* used NKJV, NASB, and NRSV, means stumble so as to fall. It is a fall brought on by stumbling over an unseen obstacle—something a blind person would do. Obtuse Israel is said to have stumbled at *“noon day”* (Isa 59:10). Their fall as not due to a deficiency of environment, but to personal blindness! In Christ Jesus, there is no reason to stumble or fall—no justification for setbacks, backsliding, and falling away. That is why God will not countenance a drawing back from Him (Heb 10:38-39).

Think of the glory of this promise: ***“For if you do these things, you will never fall”*** (NIV). With great forebodings, many a soul has contemplated the possibility of falling away. That such a thing is possible cannot be denied, for ***“more diligence”*** is required to avoid it! But it is not enough to affirm that we CAN fall away, although we surely can. A remedy for falling away must be given. The star of hope must be made to shine on the dark horizon of this wicked world. Our souls must be fortified with promise to remain standing.

First, be sure in your heart that God ***“is able to keep you from falling”*** (Jude 24-25). Even when a person is ***“weak in the faith,”*** unable to presently discern issues with clarity, if he will live in good conscience, ***“God is able to make him stand”*** (Rom 14:4). But how will the Lord do this? It will not be without the involvement of the saved, for that would be no keeping at all! Keeping assumes a desire to be kept on our part. God undergirds our feeble efforts and underwrites our diligence.

Note the strength of the statement: ***“you will NEVER fall.”*** Some theology does not allow for such a statement, but there it is! There IS a realm in which falling is not possible, where retrogression cannot take place, and where Satan and flesh are powerless! It is the heavenly places, and the realm of the Spirit. You were placed there when you were born again, and you must labor to remain there. With Divine certitude it is affirmed, ***“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh”*** (Gal 5:16). That is the same thing guaranteed in our text! Peter views it from the standpoint of appropriating what God has provided: i.e., ***“Add to your faith . . .”*** Paul viewed it from the perspective of the environment: i.e., ***“in the Spirit.”***

There is security in the heavenly realms! There is safety in Divine involvements! There is protection in fellowship with Christ! When the provisions God has supplied are appropriated in faith, there is a guarantee of blessing and security. ***“If you do these things, you shall NEVER fall.”***

But there is no safety anywhere else. Those who neglect this great salvation are not safe! Those who refuse to, in faith, add what has been given for their stability, are not secure! What is more, it will require consistent effort on our part to add these things, and maintain them. They are not museum pieces, to be displayed from a shelf. Rather, they are living and active. They are the result of a vibrant fellowship with God through Christ Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, and in faith. A great promise demands a great effort, and a great effort will be undergirded by Divine strength. It is never vain to serve the Lord, availing ourselves of what He has given in Christ!

#### AN ABUNDANT ENTRANCE MINISTERED

***“For so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”*** (NKJV). A telling sign of spiritual deadness is the willingness to settle for a little from God. Those swept up in such delusion say such things as, *If I can just make it, I will be satisfied*. That posture only betrays blindness of soul, and has no place among the people of God. Paul, who saw something of the greatness of salvation, spoke of ***“apprehending that for which I have been apprehended,” “pressing toward the mark,”*** and ***“attaining unto the resurrection of the dead”*** (Phil 3:11-12). Nothing casual about that! Lest some imagine this was only an Apostolic posture, he continued: ***“Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you”*** (Phil 3:15). This is a kingdom mind-set, and any other frame of mind is unacceptable.

The Spirit speaks of an ***“abundant”*** entrance being supplied. That is coming into glory like Israel went out of Egypt! I have long observed that many leave sin with more fervency than they enter into righteousness—their beginning is more impressive than their ending. But this is not the manner of the Kingdom! Our entrance ***“into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,”*** can be ***“abundant”*** and rich. The NIV reads, ***“you will receive a rich welcome.”*** This is a triumphant and public entrance, attended by heavenly accolades and recognition. ***“Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord”*** (Matt 25:21, NKJV). It will be ***“abundant”*** in praise from God (1 Cor 4:5) and rich rewards!

Here is an ***“entrance”*** that is ***“supplied”*** or ***“ministered”*** to the faithful ones. God gave them ***“a few things”*** in this world, He will give them ***“many”*** in the world to come. Here they were stewards, there they shall be rulers (Matt 25:21). This is an entrance that bears resemblance to Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem. ***“Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?”*** (Matt 21:9-10). This was but a faint picture of Christ’s entrance into heaven. It also is a visualization of the entrance of the overcomer into glory.

Great praise will be given to God in the abundant entrance. God Himself will give praise and honor to the one entering the everlasting Kingdom (1 Cor 4:5; John 12:26). Imagine all of heaven being ***“moved,”*** and inquiring of the one being honored! ***“This is -----, known as Paul in the world. He . . . . .”***

Think of the ***“entrance”*** that will be afforded Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the holy prophets! Think of John the Baptist and the Apostles—and the women who ministered to Jesus! There is no reason why you cannot receive an ***“abundant”*** entrance into the everlasting kingdom of Christ! The Spirit promises such will be ***“ministered”*** to you if you add these virtues to your life in the power of faith. What does the world have that compares with this? What sin is worthy the forfeiture of such a blessing? What effort is too demanding to obtain such a bountiful entrance? Go for it!!

## LESSON #7

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

***“For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease”*** (2 Pet 1:12-15, NKJV).

### INTRODUCTION

The nature of the faith-life, and the realm in which we are being perfected, demand constant and accurate reminders of the things of God. We do not live in a vacuum, though much of Christendom conducts itself as though we did. It should be clear to all of us that we cannot live in a world destined for destruction, be housed in a deteriorating body, surrounded by a sinful and corrupt society, and aggressively be sought by Satan, **without** extending significant effort to *“keep the faith.”* Jesus never spoke as though this were possible, nor did His holy Apostles. Peter now reveals his apprehension of the case, stretching himself to remind the people of God of the truth of the Gospel, and the need for their involvement. A salvation that does not bring the people into the process, is no salvation at all.

### I WILL NOT BE NEGLIGENT TO REMIND YOU

***“For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you.”*** Because of an abundant entrance being ministered to those supplying spiritual graces through their faith, Peter was not neglectful of reminding believers of ***“these things.”*** It was not enough for them simply to be brought into the kingdom, or be delivered from their sin. He had a keen interest in their eternal well-being—their entrance into glory itself! Ah, such a thought is exceedingly rare in our day. With the dominance of institutionalism in *Christianity*, getting people **in** is the fundamental thing. Thus the emphasis is placed on the great commission, missions, and other means of inflating the number of believers. While this is a most needful activity, it is by no means the preeminent one, and is nowhere so represented in Scripture. The thrust of New Covenant writings is growing up into Christ (Eph 4:15), Christ being formed in us (Gal 4:19), and laying hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12,19). The people of God are NOT to be neglected, as is the custom in our time!

Notice the precise way in which Peter states his intent: ***“I will not be negligent.”*** To fail to remind the saints of the necessity of increasing in their participation in the Divine nature is to be negligent, neglectful, indolent, and slothful. It makes no difference what other activities are present. This means that walking with the Lord will lead one into this activity—it is the nature of the Kingdom. The closer the preacher and teacher gets to Christ, the more determined they become to ***“feed the church of God”*** (Acts 20:28). The further one is from the Lord, the less interest he has in this holy work.

Observe, the reminding is ***“always,”*** and not sporadic. Spiritual life requires constant reminders of the necessity of growth in grace. The believer will never reach the point where this becomes unnecessary. That is evident by Peter’s reference to the reader’s knowledge of these things, and even their establishment in them: i.e., ***“though you know and are established in the present truth.”*** Spiritual maturity does not exclude one from pressing toward the mark! This is, or course, the precise statement of Scripture. ***“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind”*** (Phil 3:14-15a).

As long as Peter was alive, he devoted himself to keeping the memory of the saints in a spiritually productive mode. One of the acid tests of valid preaching and teaching is its effect upon the memory of the hearers. If ***“the entrance”*** of God’s words ***“gives light”*** (Psa 119:130), then the absence of them in the memory will produce darkness. Throughout Scripture, a return to sin by those affiliated with the Lord is consistently associated with forgetting Him (Judges 3:7; Psa 78:11; 106:13; Jer 23:27; Hosea 13:16). This is the nature of life in this world. Peter knew this, and therefore did not neglect the impulses of the Holy Spirit. Emphatically Jesus told him, ***“Feed my lambs,” “Feed my sheep,” “Feed my sheep”*** (John 21:15-17). Peter did not forget those words, but devoted himself, down to his death, to doing that very thing. My prayer is that there will be a resurrection of this mind-set.

### I MUST PUT OFF MY TENT

***“ . . . knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me.”*** What a refreshing way to speak of death—particularly when you recall how Peter died! This mighty Apostle was not afforded the experience of a quiet and comfortable death. Yet, he looked upon it as a liberation—putting off the encumbrance of a mortal frame, his tabernacle. This is a Kingdom way of viewing death. Paul spoke in precisely the same manner. ***“For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens”*** (2 Cor 5:1). By saying, ***“I must put off,”*** Peter referred to his

willingness to leave the body and be present with the Lord, just as Paul (2 Cor 5:8). As he indicates in this text (“*shortly*”), his death was imminent.

A corrupted view of man’s make-up is devastated by this text. There is a false theology that says man is not comprised of multiple parts (i.e., spirit, soul, and body—1 Thess 5:23). This view states the body and the soul are a single entity, and is quite common among conservative theologians. It has given rise to the “*sleep*” view of death, which sees the one dying as passing into a state of unconsciousness until the resurrection of the dead. Peter had not embraced this nonsense, but rather viewed his real person as separate from the body. Hebrews 13:3 also speaks of those “*in the body.*” Jesus spoke of “*the body and the soul*” (Matt 10:28). Paul spoke of being “*in the body*” (2 Cor 5:6), and spoke of the day of judgment as a time when we would account for the things we did “*in the body*” (2 Cor 5:10). On one occasion, when Paul was caught up into the third heaven, he did not know whether he was “*in the body or out of the body*” (2 Cor 12:2). James said, “*the body without the spirit is dead*” (James 2:26), but did NOT say the spirit without the body was dead. When confronting those who deny these things, be bold for the truth, and refuse to give ear to their nonsense.

Peter refers to the Lord’s revelation to him concerning his death: “*just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me.*” This is a reference to our Lord’s words in John 21:18. “*Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.*” Church history confirms that Peter died by crucifixion—by stretching out his hands upon a cross. Jesus told Peter he would die when he was “*old,*” and would be taken as a captive where he did not want to go. This was contrasted with his young life, when he engaged in the duties and pleasures he preferred. His would be a violent death, yet, the Spirit said, it would be one in which he would “*glorify God*” (John 21:19). Peter knew exactly what Jesus told him earlier, when he was in middle-age. Now, the time has come for its fulfillment, and he is ready to depart.

Around A.D. 64-67, Peter was crucified headlong, at his own request, and in his mid-seventies. Historians tell us he affirmed he was unworthy to die in the same manner as his Lord. The grace given to Peter is evident in the way in which he handled the contemplation of a most dreadful death. Few souls, indeed, could speak of such a death as he did. I pay tribute to mighty Peter.

### BEING CAREFUL TO ENSURE

“*Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease.*” Not only was Peter “*not negligent*” to remind the saints of the necessity of their involvement, he did so carefully, or deliberately, and with profound concern for them. For “*careful,*” the KJV version uses the strong word “*endeavor.*” The NASB says, “*I will also be diligent,*” while other modern versions say “*I will make every effort.*”

Summoning all of his resources, he wrote in such a manner as to make it difficult to forget what he was saying. Contrary to the modern mode of religious thinking, he did not resort to wisdom of speech. In this epistle he uses no illustrations, no parables, no catchy sayings. He did not give an extensive outline of his recent experiences, or refer to contemporary events. Such trappings make it easier to **forget** the Word, lacking the spiritual power that sophists attribute to them. The NASB, noted for its precision, says, “*And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind.*” This is a godly way of looking at exhortation!

Unless they are REMEMBERED, the words of God obtain no power for the individual. They are to be hidden in the heart so they may be recalled “*at any time,*” bringing strength and hope to the soul. And what will ensure this can take place? It is by the speaker giving diligence to articulate in a manner conducive to godly remembrance!

Think how Peter did this. He first tells them of the Source of their faith (1:1). He reminds his readers grace and peace can be multiplied to them (1:2). With solemnity he declares everything required for life and godliness has been supplied by God (1:3). The precious promises of God are held out as the appointed means of participating in the Divine nature (1:4). The necessity of that participation is affirmed (1:5-10). He holds before them the possibility of an “*abundant entrance*” into eternity (1:11). Later he affirms the inspiration of God’s Word (1:21). With great power, he declares how some have been deceived and destroyed (2:1-21). Peter then declares the coming of the Lord and the destruction of the present heavens and earth. **These are the wrappings that make it easy to remember his words.**

I cannot help but observe how this approach clashes with contemporary thoughts of preaching and teaching. Today men try and make it easy for the message to be **received**. Peter endeavored to make it easy to be **remembered**. To do so, he enveloped it with eternity and eternal concepts. Scripture was dominant in his presentation. He confined himself to examples set forth in the Word of God, and spoke with authority and a note of finality. He was not presenting options or suggestions, but things pertaining to “*life and godliness.*” He did not comment on his geographical location, but his spiritual condition. He did not refer to the social climate, but the spiritual one. With spiritual deliberation, he sought to persuade believers of the nature of spiritual life, and of their involvement in it.

Thus Peter provides a most excellent example to everyone ministering to the people of God! He wrote so people could remember what he said **after** he passed from this life! May that be the aim of us all!

## LESSON #8

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

*“For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain” (2 Pet 1:16-18, NKJV).*

### INTRODUCTION

Peter now shares the Source and heart of His message. He is not passing along information handed down to him by one of his peers. There is a reason why the Apostolic message centers in the Person of Christ, and Peter will unfold that reason in a few short words. He defines the summary of the message, providing a touchstone by which all preaching and teaching may be measured. He will also hearken back to a central event in the Gospel—one that is rarely viewed by our contemporaries with the perspective of this aged Apostle. Remember, Peter is endeavoring to stir up the minds of his readers so they will remember the message after his decease.

### WE DID NOT FOLLOW FABLES

*“For we did not follow cunningly devised fables . . .”* Peter associates himself with the other Apostles, not seeking his own glory. This is the manner of the Apostles—it was their **message** that united them, and they were not telling it from their point of view (Rom 3:8; 1 Cor 4:9; 15:9; 2 Pet 3:2; Jude 17). Their **function** was given to them of the Lord, as well as their **message**. They took their role seriously, and never departed from it.

In the Apostles’ time, as well as in ours, there were *“fables”* present in the land—legends concocted by men and pawned off as the truth of God. Paul spoke of *“Jewish fables”* (1 Tim 1:4; Tit 1:14), and *“old wives fables”* (1 Tim 4:7). He warned of coming times when men would be turned from the truth *“to fables”* (2 Tim 4:4). To show how easily such sayings can begin, one legend that *“went out among the brethren”* was that John would not die (John 21:21-23). But that was NOT a *“cunningly devised fable.”*

The Apostolic message was not the result of research, nor was it the concoction of a message designed to bring advantages to its bearer. Even Luke, who himself was not an Apostle, took special care to deliver the message the Apostles had received, which was the sole object of his attention. *“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning . . .”* (Lk 1:1-3). A human view of Christ Jesus will not mix with the revealed one!

It was God Himself, through the Spirit, that revealed this message to the Apostles, of whom Peter was a chief. *“ . . . the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets”* (Eph 3:5; 2:20). Jesus promised them the Holy Spirit Himself would direct them into *“all truth,”* even bringing to their *“remembrance all things”* that He had said (John 16:13-14; 14:26).

Because of this circumstance, the word of the Apostles, concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, is called *“the record (testimony) that God gave of his Son”* (1 John 5:10-11), and the *“Gospel of God,”* *“His Son,”* *“Christ,”* *“peace,”* *“your salvation,”* and *“the blessed God”* (Rom 1:1,9,16; 10:15; Eph 1:13; 1 Tim 1:11). Understand, this could not be said if their message was not inspired—given to them directly by God through the Spirit. It was not the result of disciplined research, nor was it an expression of their interpretation of a revelation.

Too, the events affirmed by the Apostles were not exaggerations, distortions, or misrepresentations. They were not written to impress men, but to honor Christ and please God. This is why *“the Gospel”* is the *“power of God unto salvation”* (Rom 1:16). It conveys precisely what God has done in Christ, and says it precisely the way God wants it said. Therefore, it becomes the appointed vehicle through which God saves, sanctifies, and keeps the people of God. God is greatly to be praised for the precision reflected in the record He has given of His Son. It is to be believed without reluctance.

### CHRIST’S POWER AND COMING

*“ . . . when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .”* Here Peter reveals the substance of the Apostolic message. It is something that is not apparent, like some aspects of morality are—it is *“made known.”* That means apart from its declaration, it cannot be comprehended. It is NOT declared by the creation, as is the power and divinity of the Godhead (Rom 1:20; Psa 19:1-3). Nor, indeed, does the Apostolic message deal primarily with human conduct, as essential as Divine instruction is in that area. The **MESSAGE** is not a

compendium of what man should do, but of what God has done in Christ Jesus! Matters relating to righteous living are not, technically, the message, but the *implication* of the message. That is to say, were it not for the message of Christ, there would be no point to talking about morality. The Law, which defined morality, leads us to Christ, but was not essentially a MESSAGE or proclamation (Gal 3:24).

**THE POWER OF CHRIST.** The Gospel makes known *“the power”* of Christ. This relates directly to the matter of bringing the sons of God to glory. This is the *“power”* Jesus received upon His exaltation to the throne, where *“angels and authorities and powers”* have been *“made subject to Him”* (1 Pet 3:22). Although His power was revealed during His earthly ministry, that is not the *“power”* in reference here. That was but introductory to the power He now possesses. Having removed our sins and destroyed our foe, He is now declared to be *“the power and wisdom of God”* (1 Cor 1:24). That potency relates to the empowerment of the believer, and is referred to as resting upon us (2 Cor 12:9). This is transforming and keeping power; power over our foes, and power over the angels who minister to us. Such sovereignty is now made known through the Gospel of Christ. It is High Priestly, interceding, and shepherding power.

**THE COMING OF CHRIST.** The *“coming”* of Christ is also integral to the message. This refers to the second appearing of Christ. The word *“coming”* is translated from *παρουσία* (pa-rous-ian), a word which, when referring to Christ, refers exclusively to Him coming again (Matt 24:3,27,37,39; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1,8; James 5:7,8; 2 Pet 3:4,12; 1 John 2:28). The return of Jesus is a fundamental aspect of proclaiming Him! That proclamation, Peter says, was **NOT** the result of embracing *“cunningly devised fables.”* I suppose there are more religious fables relating to Christ’s return than any other subject, and it has had a devastating effect upon the people of God.

The coming of Christ is the *“blessed hope”* of the church (Tit 2:13). However, that hope shall not dominate us if it is not proclaimed! It is then, and only then, that *“we shall also appear with Him in glory”* (Col 3:4). Then, we shall receive our new and immortal bodies (Phil 3:20-21). Our faith will be found *“unto praise and honor and glory”* at that time (1 Pet 1:7). Our salvation, if duly received, will cause us to unashamed when He appears (1 John 2:28). What *“cunningly devised fable”* fosters such wonderful things? Let preachers and teachers follow the appointed example of the Apostles, and make known both the power and coming of Christ Jesus!

### EYEWITNESSES OF HIS MAJESTY!

*“ . . . but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.”* To justify his message, Peter reaches back to a key event in Christ’s life. It is interesting to consider which one, under the Spirit’s inspiration, he chose. He did not choose, what is called, *the great commission*. Nor did he choose one of Christ’s great miracles, or His words to Peter when he made the good confession. He did not even choose one of His post-resurrection appearances, or His ascension into glory. **Instead, he chose an occurrence attended by God’s voice from heaven.**

He refers to the transfiguration of Jesus, that awesome happening which transpired on a mountain, while Jesus was praying (Matt 17:1-9; Mark 9:1-10; Luke 9:28-36). On this occasion, Christ’s countenance was altered, and His clothing glowed with unparalleled whiteness. Moses and Elijah came from the unseen realms, *“in glory,”* to speak with Him about the death He was to *“accomplish at Jerusalem.”* But Peter makes no reference to the attending personalities, the glow of Christ’s face, or the alteration of His clothing. He calls all of that *“His majesty,”* and states they were *“eye witnesses”* of this marvelous revelation. This was not hear-say! Unlike the carnal, Peter recalls the PERSON of Christ, not the details surrounding Him.

What Peter now remembers is arresting because of its clash with contemporary representations of Jesus. A seasoned Apostle, nearing his death, and inspired by the Spirit, **Peter recalls what God said about Jesus!** He does not recount what Moses or Elijah might have said. With apparent care, he does not declare what men have said, or even what he himself said in Caesarea Philippi. **Peter recalls what God said about Jesus!** He tells us the origin of the Voice: *“a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory.”* We know it was God’s voice because of what was said. *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

Note, the *“Voice”* did not come to Peter, James, and John, but *“to Him!”* It represents the purest of all communication—the Father speaking to the Son. Earlier, when Jesus embarked on His ministry, the same Voice said the same words from heaven (Matt 3:17). At that time, it was spoken to strengthen the Son to begin His ministry. On the mount of transfiguration it was spoken to strengthen Him to complete it.

In the last analysis, the most critical view of Christ is God’s view! If our acceptance by God depends upon our identity with Jesus, we must know what the Father thinks of the Son! Do not take for granted that people know this! The proclamation of the Gospel necessarily involves an emphasis of the Father being pleased with Him, and satisfied with His accomplishments. While much preaching of our day ignores the Father, Peter did not. When seeking to impress the truth upon his readers so they would remember the message after his decease, he told them, among other things, what God said about Jesus. Comprehending this has a remarkable impact upon believers.

## LESSON #9

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

*“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”* (2 Pet 1:19-21, NKJV).

### INTRODUCTION

In this remarkable text, prophecy and Scripture are brought together in a powerful way, showing the two cannot be separated. The Word which we have received in Christ Jesus is **“more sure,”** validating all that was prophesied before, and become the focus of true doctrine, or teaching. The source of the Scriptures themselves is also defined. If we are to eternally benefit from the Word of God, we must be firmly convinced of its origin. Our faith cannot waver at this point. Nor, indeed, can we allow self-proclaimed *scholars* to convince us the secret to understanding Scripture is a scientific approach to its understanding. This will become apparent from the text.

### A MORE SURE WORD – CONFIRMED!

*“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed . . . (a more sure word of prophecy, KJV)”* In saying *“And so . . . ,”* Peter is alluding to verses 17 and 18, where God declared His good pleasure on Christ the Son. It is that word from heaven that gives us **“the prophetic Word confirmed,”** or a more **“sure word of prophecy.”** The “prophetic Word,” or the “word of prophecy,” refers to the message of the prophets, who share with the Apostles as the **“foundation”** upon which we are built (Eph 2:20).

Although Peter, James, and John, **“were eyewitnesses of his majesty”** (v 16), the sureness of the Word did not rest upon their witness, but upon the Word of the Father from heaven. They heard that word, but it was the testimony of God Himself that made the **“word of prophecy”** more sure.

There is a basis assumption that lies at the root of Peter’s word. **It is this: the fundamental message of the prophets was that of a coming Savior.** In his first epistle, he also endeavored to make this clear. **“Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow”** (1 Pet 1:10-11). If we do not read Moses and the Prophets with the Lord Jesus in mind, their message will pass by us. While they did, indeed, speak of other matters (the judgment of Israel for its sins, as well as of other nations), that was not the thrust of their message. From the Garden of Eden, just before the expulsion of Adam and Even, until John the Baptist, the prevailing message from God to man was that of the coming Messiah!

The burden of our Scriptures are the words of the Prophets of old. To be precise, their words form 76.6% of all Scripture. Yet, there is a prevailing ignorance of their words in the land that is shameful. Think of some of them. **“Seed”** of woman (Gen 3:15), **“Seed”** of Abraham (Gen 22:18), **“Shiloh”** (Gen 49:10), **“Prophet”** (Deut 18:15-18), sin bearer (Isa 53:4-6), **“Sun of righteousness”** with healing rays (Mal 4:2), A reigning King (Isa 9:6-7; 32:1), and the **“Branch of righteousness”** (Jer 33:15). The sacrificial system pointed to Him. The High Priest pointed to Him. Deliverance from sin would be through Him. Access to God would come through Him. Effective leading would be provided by Him. He is the fulfillment of the prophetic word.

Peter recalled that day on the **“holy mount,”** when God the Father confessed His Son to be the One in Whom He was well pleased. The Scriptures came alive when that word was comprehended. Peter did not say his experience made them pulsate with life, but God’s confession of Jesus! This cannot be over-emphasized. What we think of Jesus is important, and our eternal destiny will be determined by what we think of Him. However, undergirding the entirety of our salvation is what the Father thinks of the Son. That is what validates our salvation! It is also what gives weight to the words of the prophets. Every good thing that was promised by those unappreciated prophets, is fulfilled to and in us, through the Lord Jesus Christ. When God approved Jesus, He also confirmed every prophecy concerning Him!

### YOU DO WELL TO TAKE HEED TO IT

*“. . . which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”* Here is one of the most arresting statements in Scripture. **Both human and Divine activity are joined together in our consideration of Scripture.** On the human side of the equation, we **“heed,”** or give earnest consideration to, the Word. On the Divine side of that equation, the **“day dawns”** and the **“Morning Star”** rises in our heart! Make sure of this: the day will not dawn, and the Morning Star will not rise in our hearts, apart from a diligent reflection upon the Word of God—particularly as it relates to Christ Jesus.

The prophetic word, or the message of Christ, is like a **“light that shines in a dark place.”** The **“dark place”** is both the world and our hearts by nature. When sin entered our race, so did pervading darkness. Scripture

describes those out of Christ as sitting *“in darkness”* and the *“region of death”* (Matt 4:16). Morally, it is like the natural darkness that covered Egypt during the ninth plague upon it. It is *“thick”* and can be *“felt”* (Ex 10:21-22). Nature is like a dark and foreboding cloud upon the heart. God, nor the things of God, can be seen until light breaks through its covering.

The Word of God can break through this moral darkness, enlightening the soul. But we must give heed to it for this to happen. Many souls remain ignorant of God and His great salvation, simply because they give no heed to the Scriptures. They see no relevance in them, so they remain in darkness.

What is the dawning of the day? It is when the soul is enlightened concerning the Person and work of the Lord Jesus—when things fall together, so to speak, and *“spiritual understanding”* is experienced (Col 1:9). It is when the mystery of salvation is replaced by a comprehension of it—when everything begins to make sense. Confidence and assurance flood the heart when this takes place. The Word of God is transformed from a rule book into a recognized source of spiritual life. It is no longer seen as history, but as the *“record God has given of His Son”* (1 John 5:10-11). This is the illumination which Paul sought for the churches (Eph 1:18-20; 3:15-20).

*“The Day Star rising in your heart”* is equivalent to Christ being *“formed”* in us (Gal 4:19). It is when Jesus *“manifests”* Himself to us (John 14:21). This is spiritual maturity, when we become equal to the challenges of life, as well as our stewardship of the truth. As that *“Day Star”* rises in our hearts, His healing rays pervade our persons. The *“peace of God”* rules our hearts (Col 3:15). We are filled with *“all joy and peace in believing”* (Rom 15:13). The *“fruit of the Spirit”* becomes more dominant (Gal 5:22-25). In this experience we become more *“partakers of the Divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4). While this begins in our regeneration, it must be brought to its apex.

If those *“do well”* who give earnest heed to the Scriptures, what must be said of those who do not? Not only are they NOT doing well, they will not experience the refreshing *“light”* so need in this *“dark place.”* The *“Day Star,”* which is Christ Jesus Himself (Rev 22:16), will not rise to dominance in their hearts. How simply the condition can be remedied! It is by *“taking heed”* to the prophetic word of the Savior—the message of all Scripture!

## THE SOURCE OF ALL PROPHECY

*“ . . . knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”*

The term *“no prophecy”* does not refer to only a part of Scripture, for *“all Scripture is given by inspiration of God”* (2 Tim 3:16-17). Here, the Spirit focuses on the details of Scripture—the prophecy of Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah . . . etc.

The word *“private interpretation”* refers to the manner in which the prophets gave their messages. No prophet gave his own interpretation of the message or vision he received. Peter confirms in his first epistle that the prophets diligently tried to find the meaning of the revelation placed in their charge. They did not always understand the message in all of its details. They simply could NOT interpret it for themselves (1 Pet 1:10-12).

This is of central importance. Mind you, Peter affirms God has validated the prophetic word. This would not have been possible if the word of the prophets was corrupted with their own views. The fact the God could unqualifiedly confirm their word proves it came from Him in the first place. In the case every *“prophecy of Scripture,”* therefore, the notion an “author’s intended meaning” is absurd.

What is more, Scripture did not come *“by the will of man.”* *“Prophecy of Scripture”* is not the result of man’s searching, conjecture, of calculation. That is, the human will is not capable of generating a word from God. If God does not give it, it simply cannot be conjured up, regardless of the intellectual abilities of the individual.

To get at the heart of this passage, the promise of a Savior Who would accomplish what Jesus did, could not have been conceived by *“the will of man.”* The *“natural man”* not only does NOT receive the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:14), it cannot produce a word from God. No individual is capable of imagining or wanting such a great Savior. The accomplishments of the Son extend beyond the imaginative powers of mere mortals. His is, indeed, a *“great salvation.”*

The Lord was also deliberate in WHO brought the message to us. He did not choose professional men, or merely good speakers or writers. It was *“holy men of God”*—men living in an acute awareness of the Lord Himself, and in separation from the world. The prophets were called *“holy prophets”* (Lk 1:70; Acts 3:21; Rev 22:6). God also referred to them as *“My prophets”* (1 Chron 16:22; Psa 105:15), warning their peers to do them *“no harm.”*

These *“holy men of God”* were *“carried along”* by God’s Holy Spirit. They were given to see and hear things beyond the perimeter of human knowledge and experience. Because they were *“holy,”* the Spirit could divulge the purpose of God to them. What Scripture says, therefore, is nothing less than the word of the Holy Spirit. It is *“what the Spirit is saying to the churches”* (Rev 2:7). Elsewhere, Paul says, *“the Spirit expressly says*

*“ . . . ”* (1 Tim 4:1). This is the kind of Word God can confirm! It is the kind of Word that can bring the dawning of the day! Because of this Word, the Day Star can rise in our hearts! Let us give earnest heed to it.

## LESSON #10

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

***“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.” (2 Pet 2:1, KJV).***

### INTRODUCTION

Our adversary, the devil, promotes condemnation among the people of God. He does so by means of doctrines—subtle teachings that lead men into a state of condemnation. Satan knows that what we embrace will determine how we view God and Christ, and how we live. Those sent by Satan do not carry signs, warning us of the danger of their message. They appear to be innocent enough, and to possess interesting and harmless views. But this is not the case at all. Satan never engages in innocent or harmless ventures. There is always an evil purpose behind his workings, and it is to separate the saints from their God, and divert them from His great salvation. The people of God do well to develop a keen sensitivity to the truth—so keen that anything contrary to it will be abrasive to spirits.

### THERE WERE FALSE PROPHETS

***“But there were also false prophets among the people . . .”*** Prophets sent by God are not the only prophets! There are also ***“false prophets”*** with which the people of God must contend. Peter shows this has always been the case. ***“The people,”*** in this instance, are the Jews, to whom the oracles of God had been committed (Rom 9:1-2). It is bad enough to have pretentious prophets in the world, but to have them ***“among the people”*** is a menace of which the saints must be aware.

Interestingly, the words ***“false prophets”*** and ***“false prophet”*** are not found in the Old Testament Scriptures. The NIV takes the liberty of using the words in paraphrasing Isaiah 44:25 and Jeremiah 50:36. In both texts, the other versions correctly use the term ***“liars”*** or ***“babblers”*** (Isaiah) and ***“diviners”*** or ***“soothsayers”*** (Jeremiah). Isaiah emphasizes the falsity of their message, while Jeremiah indicates their Satanic source.

What is a ***“false prophet?”*** Simply put, it is a prophet God has not sent, who bears a message God did not give. Frequently, and with no kindness, God spoke of such prophets—***“among the people.”*** The Divine intolerance of such individuals is evident in His scathing words concerning them. ***“I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying . . . the prophets who prophesy lies? . . . prophets of the deceit of their own heart, who try to make My people forget My name . . .”*** (Jer 23:25-27). ***“Therefore behold, I am against the prophets, says the LORD, who steal My words every one from his neighbor. Behold, I am against the prophets, says the LORD, who use their tongues and say, ‘He says.’ Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams, says the LORD, and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, says the LORD”*** (Jer 23:30-31).

Under the Law, false prophets were to be killed. ***“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die”*** (Deut 18:20). The Lord even gave the people tests to determine the validity of a prophet (Deut 13:1-3; 18:21-22). The people of God were to take seriously anyone claiming to have message from God. Those who told lies in God’s name were to be removed from the people.

From old time, therefore, Satan has sought to come to people in the name of the Lord. Speakers and purported leaders who did not walk with God were prime candidates for his wicked purposes. His intent was to move the people away from the Lord, and wash the truth from their minds.

Wherever there is a word from the Lord, there will be attempts from Satan to corrupt it. The Lord did not simply forbid the rise of such men (which He could have done), but alerted His people to their presence, and called upon them to do something about it. First, they were not to listen to them, and second, they were not to allow them to speak, thereby corrupting the environment. The falsity of these men was not readily apparent. It required some diligence on the part of the people to detect them.

### THERE WILL BE FALSE TEACHERS AMONG YOU

***“ . . . even as there will be false teachers among you . . .”*** Those supposing that grace automatically protects us from all spiritual intrusions do well to rethink the matter. Jesus warned of false prophets, saying they would not be readily detected, coming in ***“sheep’s clothing.”*** They would be ferocious, likened to ***“ravens wolves”*** (Matt 7:15). He also warned of their multiplicity, and success in deceiving ***“many.”*** Some of them would ***“show great***

*signs and wonders,*” so influential, that were it possible, they would deceive *“the very elect”* (Matt 24:11,24). Several years after Peter wrote this letter, John the Beloved confirmed *“many false prophets are gone out into the world”* (1 John 4:1).

Peter warns the false prophets would be *“among you,”* mingled, as it were, with the brethren. This coincides with Paul’s prophesy to the elders of Ephesus, that from among themselves such men would arise. *“Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves”* (Acts 20:30). Hymenaeus and Philetus were among such men, teaching the resurrection had past, and thereby overthrowing the faith of some (2 Tim 2:18). They were *“among”* the brethren. There was a false prophetess in the church of Thyatira, who taught Christ’s servants to commit fornication, and eat things sacrificed to idols (Rev 2:20). Ah, the church has, and continues to, suffer from such people.

This is, of course, another Satanic intrusion. If he cannot lure men away from God by worldly enticements, he will do so with theological ones. Warning the church of this tactic, Paul spoke of some who claimed to be Apostles, elaborating upon Satan’s role in the matter. *“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works”* (2 Cor 11:13-15).

This is the devil’s manner of penetrating the church—through erroneous teaching. You can imagine the degree of success he will have among those who say doctrine is of no consequence. Remember how Satan approached Eve? He started with what God said, and began to reason from a *religious* point of view (Gen 3:1-5). Paul was concerned about this subtle tactic, and warned the Corinthians about it. *“But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ”* (2 Cor 11:3).

There is such a thing as *“another Jesus”* and *“another Gospel”* (2 Cor 11:4). They cannot save, and have no power—yet are presented as though this were not the case. Paul also warned the Galatians of those preaching *“another Gospel”* (Gal 1:7-8). Suffice it to say, the people of God must have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Gospel, so they can detect such false gospels and prophets. The condition of many professed believers makes them vulnerable to the machinations of false prophets, which, we are clearly told, will come among the people of God.

### HERESIES SECRETLY BROUGHT IT

*“ . . . who privily (privately) shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.”* Other versions soften the impact of the verse by saying *“destructive heresies.”* We are speaking of doctrines that CAUSE men to be condemned!—teachings that lead to hell. It is a staggering consideration! Again, those imagining that doctrine is of no consequence need to listen.

The doctrines in reference are brought in privately, or secretly. No one realized what was happening until their faith was overthrown. The teachings of these *“false prophets”* are called *“heresies.”* A heresy is more than something that is not true. It is a teaching that produces a sect, party, or school of thought that is at variance with the truth of God. Thayer’s Greek lexicon observes such are *“separatists groups claiming status within the Christian community.”* Whereas the truth of God, particularly the Gospel of Christ, unites those who accept it, heresies divide men from the truth and one another. Thus, these *“heresies”* are called *“damnable heresies,”* that lead God to damn the soul.

Grammatically, the word *“damnable”* means spiritual destruction or ruin. The teachings in question, therefore, bring men into a state of worthlessness and waste, where they must be discarded to the garbage dump of hell. They make the soul a *“castaway,”* good for nothing, and incapable of fitting into glory. If men are saved by possessing a *“love of the truth,”* they will surely be lost for abandoning such to embrace a lie (2 Thess 2:10-12).

These religious heretics (and remember, they will be among believers) are even brought to the point where they *“deny the Lord that bought them.”* This denial is a refusal to acknowledge Christ’s Headship. Such men exalt themselves rather than Christ, and are not willing to receive the fact they are *“not their own”* (1 Cor 6:19). Their thrust is not the Gospel of Christ. They have become *“enemies of the cross of Christ”* because they *“seek their own”* (Phil 2:21; 3:18-19). Their denial no doubt includes a fleshly and indulgent life. As it is written, *“They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work”* (Tit 1:16). At any rate, they have no real identity with Christ Jesus, and yet pretend to come from Him with a new and novel message.

Their lot will be *“swift destruction.”* God will not long tolerate their spiritual insolence. They have dared to come in His name, yet bring teachings that lead men to be condemned. The idea here is that they are **BRINGING** upon themselves *“swift destruction.”* Their teaching has set the wrath of God in motion, and it is just a matter of time until it will consume them. As Paul said of such teachers, *“But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs (Jannes and Jambres) also was”* (2 Tim 3:9). Their time will run out, and their influence will come to an end.

In the meantime, the people of God must develop a heart and insatiable appetite for the Gospel of Christ. As their hearts are firmly knit with it, the heresies of wicked men will become more readily apparent. Thus they will be able to be discarded as worthless rubbish.

## LESSON #11

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

*“And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you . . .”* (2 Pet 2:2-3a, KJV).

### INTRODUCTION

If it is true that God *“so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son”* that those who believe might have everlasting life, then He is not indifferent concerning misrepresentations of Himself, His Son, and His *“great salvation.”* The Spirit not only informs us of the presence of false prophets among the saved, He declares they will heap a large following to themselves. The apparent success of these liars has been a source of confusion to many believers through the centuries. Can Satan operate at will, sending his corrupt messengers throughout the world? In this section, the Apostle begins to reason concerning these *doctrine-corrupters*. We are not to expect them to be so readily apparent they cannot be missed, or that their diabolical efforts will all be in vain.

### MANY WILL FOLLOW THEIR WAYS

*“And many shall follow their pernicious ways . . .”* Here is the tragedy of false prophets—there are *“many”* who follow their *“ways.”* Their *“ways”* are called *“pernicious ways.”* Such ways are deadly, fatal, and lethal. They are ways which lead to destruction. The emphasis, however, is not on where they lead, but **HOW** they lead there. Other versions capture the sense of the text: *“their sensuality”* (NASB), *“their shameful ways”* (NIV), *“their licentiousness”* (RSV), *“their licentious ways”* (NRSV). The *“ways”* in reference lead to destruction because they are indulgent ways. Rather than crucifying the flesh, they make provision to fulfill its lusts. Even though *“they that are in the flesh cannot please God”* (Rom 8:8), the message disseminated by these false prophets promote that very manner of life.

These prophets *“allure through the lusts of the flesh”* (2 Pet 2:18), appealing to the lower and sinful nature of humanity. It should not surprise us that such religion is so dominant in our country. From music to daily living, doctrines have been taught that allow professed believers to embrace the spirit of the world. In such a circumstance, the *“flesh”* becomes the dominant consideration. Mortifying the deeds of the body through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:13) is rarely mentioned, as well as the admonition to *“mortify our members”* that are upon the earth (Col 3:5). While it is thoroughly reprehensible, immorality in the church is not at all uncommon. Why does this condition exist? It is because of the doctrines that are taught. An approach to the Gospel is being offered that does not produce a revulsion at the presence of sin, nor arm the soul to repulse Satanic advances. That is the kind of doctrine to which our text refers.

The popularity of such *“ways”* is staggering. Even the broad way that leads to destruction is being promulgated, multitudes embrace it eagerly, as lambs being led to the slaughter. Jesus said *“many false prophets will rise up and deceive many”* (Matt 10:11). The accentuates the effect of the fall of humanity. When Scripture affirms *“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23), more is meant than the presence of a defiled condition. Sin has inducted a **vulnerable** condition, where individuals are susceptible to the artifices of the devil. To quench or resist the Spirit, or fail to walk by faith, is to place ourselves squarely in the path of the evil one.

From another viewpoint, the existence of these false teachers becomes one of the means of separating the wheat from the chaff. The Spirit states it this way. *“For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you”* (1 Cor 11:19). *“They which are approved”* are those living by faith, fighting the good fight of faith, and crucifying the flesh, with its affections and lusts (Gal 5:24). All others, regardless of their profession, will be found among the *“many”* who follow the destructive and indulgent ways of the false prophets.

This does not excuse their manners or their teaching. They are still reprehensible, and will be held in strict accountability. No man or woman of God can be tolerant of gross misrepresentations of the Gospel of Christ. It is always serious beyond description to distort the message of God.

### THE TRUTH WILL BE BLASPHEMED

*“ . . . because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.”* When reproach is brought upon *“the way of truth,”* the door stands ajar for the devil to enter. Note, it is not called a *“way of life,”* but *“the way of truth!”* *“Way”* is used in the sense of highway, or road to be traveled. In a Person, this *“Way”* is Jesus Himself (John 14:6). From the standpoint of teaching, it is the thrust of the Gospel. In this case, the Lord Jesus and the doctrine concerning Him are held up to ridicule and disrepute.

The world is looking for an excuse to refuse and malign the truth of the Gospel, and the *“ways”* of false teachers give them an occasion to do so. During the last few years, we have witnessed the blaspheming of the truth because of the sin of religious leaders. It is not a light thing. The Spirit, for example, counseled young mothers to take care the Word of God was *“not blasphemed”* because of their conduct (Tit 2:5). If you will recall, the single transgression of David with Bathsheba gave *“great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme”* (2 Sam 12:14). In a scathing rebuke of the Jewish believers in Rome, Paul wrote, *“the name of God is blasphemed*

**among the Gentiles because of you”** (Rom 2:24). Even the slaves of the first century were exhorted to conduct themselves in a godly manner toward their masters **“so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed”** (1 Tim 6:1). Each of us is personally responsible in this area.

Jesus told us it was impossible to avoid the presence of offences. However, a solemn woe is pronounced upon all who cause them. **“It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should come, but woe to him through whom they come!”** (Luke 17:1). The *church world* teaches us to be tolerant of the fall of its leaders, and to emphasize their reconciliation. We are for the recovery of all who have fallen. However, we must not forget the effects of their sinful ways, whereby many have been defiled. A woe is pronounced upon such individuals, and we do well to take it seriously.

The prophets described a condition similar to the one affirmed in our text. The words used to express it are arresting, and show the seriousness of tampering with the truth of God, seeking to gain personal advantage through it. **“In transgressing and lying against the LORD, And departing from our God, Speaking oppression and revolt, Conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. Justice is turned back, And righteousness stands afar off; For truth is fallen in the street, And equity cannot enter”** (Isa 59:13-14). What remarkable words! Jeremiah spoke of the same condition. **“This is a nation that does not obey the voice of the LORD their God nor receive correction. Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth”** (Jer 7:28).

A godly demeanor adorns **“the doctrine of God our Savior,”** making it **“attractive”** to the hearers (Tit 2:10, KJV, NIV). When, therefore, doctrines are proclaimed which allow for the indulgence of the flesh, the sword of the truth is dulled, and its effectiveness is reduced. God is thus reproached, Jesus dishonored, and the truth maligned. The very words used to describe this condition shout loudly to our hearts of the seriousness of the condition.

### THE MERCHANDISING OF PEOPLE

**“ . . . And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you . . . ”** The chief appeal of these false prophets is to the flesh—the **“old man,” “natural man,”** or fallen nature (Col 3:9; 1 Cor 2:14). It is a self-centered, self-serving message that they bring, allowing individuals to remain at the center of their small universe. **“Covetousness”** is the watchword of their message! It was through this sin that Satan deceived Eve, offering to her a supposed personal advantage (Gen 3:6). Achan foolishly transgressed the command of the Almighty, thinking to have gained some personal benefit (Josh 7:1-24).

When selecting men to assist in the leadership of Israel, the Lord required **“able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness”** (Ex 18:21). With obvious fervency, the Psalmist prayed, **“Incline my heart to Your testimonies, And not to covetousness”** (Psa 119:36). With unmistakable sobriety Jesus warned, **“Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses”** (Luke 12:15). The Spirit admonishes believers not to allow **“covetousness”** to **“be once named among you, as becometh saints”** (Eph 5:3). Covetousness is even identified as **“idolatry”** (Col 3:5). Yet, in spite of extensive Divine warning, these false prophets attract people to themselves **“through covetousness.”** Among other things, this reveals how deeply sin has affected the human race. The remnants of the old nature in the best of believers are sufficient to give false prophets a foothold, unless they are crucified.

These teachers employ **“feigned words”** to deceive the people. These are *false words* (NASB), *deceptive words* (NKJV), and *stories they have made up* (NIV). They have no word from God, so have concocted their own. Their message originated with themselves. Of such men Jesus said, **“He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory”** (John 7:18). Their fables are **“cunningly devised”** (2 Pet 1:16), and their words **“flattering”** (1 Thess 2:5). They do not serve the Lord Jesus, **“but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple”** (Rom 16:18).

These are exploiters, making **“merchandise”** of the people. They care nothing for the sheep, but only seek to use them for earthly gain and advantage. In the Revelation, John saw the extensive influence of corrupted religion. The false church was joined to the world, and exploited humanity to the fullest. This adulterous church is spoken of in most arresting language. Her merchandise, or goods in which she trafficked, are described as **“gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men”** (Rev 18:12-13, NKJV).

Let every soul be alert to the encroachments of the wicked one. Beware of those who take from the saints, but offer them no advantage in the good fight of faith, no food for the soul, or hope for the world to come!

## LESSON #12

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

***“ . . . for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly . . . ”*** (2 Pet 2:3b-5, KJV).

### INTRODUCTION

The sobriety with which the subject of false prophets is approached is engaging. There is not the slightest taint of humor, juvenescence, or casualness in these words of the Spirit. The absolute necessity of uncorrupted preaching is accentuated, as well as the serious consequences of contaminating the Gospel of Christ. The presence of false prophets among the people of God is approached with a degree of importance that is scarcely found in our time. Among other things, this reveals how far popular religion has fallen. A society which attaches little value to doctrinal faithfulness and integrity is on the brink of eternal ruin.

### DESTRUCTION DOES NOT SLUMBER

***“ . . . whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.”*** Those who are averse to harsh language will find this a difficult text, indeed! There is no mercy extended to these false teachers, who deliberately corrupt the word of the Gospel for self-gain. The NRSV translates the verse with more clarity. ***“Their condemnation, pronounced against them long ago, has not been idle, and their destruction is not asleep.”*** The NIV is even more descriptive. ***“Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.”*** The idea is, even though these teachers appear to have been successful, their diabolical efforts have not gone unnoticed. They have been going about their wicked work with the wrath of God hovering over them. God has not fallen asleep, nor have His words against them receded into the background.

These words remind us of one of our blessed Lord's utterances. ***“ . . . he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”*** (John 3:36). From the foundation of the world, God has determined to bring all such *corrupters* into condemnation. Peter alludes to this in his First Epistle. (1 Pet 2:8). ***“They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed”*** Just as ***“God has not appointed us unto wrath”*** (1 Thess 5:9), there are some who have been so appointed. Lest men take the solemn words lightly, Peter later describes these teachers in words that startle lethargic souls. ***“But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness . . . ”*** (verse 12).

The justice of God is not asleep, although it appears so to those who walk with the devil. His wrath hovers as a foreboding cloud over those who think so much of themselves they pervert the Gospel, delivered by God, to rescue men from the clutches of the wicked one. The stern words of the Spirit, found in Romans 2:5, apply to them. ***“But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God”*** (NASB).

There are only two conditions in which individuals live: condemnation or salvation. There is no neutral ground. Outside of Christ, and particularly when using the Gospel for covetous objectives, men are described as ***“indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and”*** are ***“by nature children of wrath, even as the rest”*** (Eph 2:3). In a day when preaching has become altogether too palpable for the flesh, such words are rarely heard. A contaminated Gospel will not convince men to flee to Christ for refuge (Heb 6:18), or to ***“call upon the name of the Lord”*** (Rom 10:13). Too often there is no sense of urgency in contemporary preaching, and that is a disastrous situation. If it is true that the judgment of God is not idle, and destruction is not asleep, indifference, whether in preaching or hearing, is intolerable! When the gravity of this situation is perceived, as it is declared in our text, a dramatic change will take place in those who speak for God. He is fully aware of both faithfulness and unfaithfulness in preaching.

### THE FALLEN ANGELS

***“ For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment.”*** The Spirit now fortifies the affirmation that God's judgment is sure against those at variance with Him. An occasion is mentioned about which little is known—***“angels who sinned.”*** The very thought is remarkable, particularly in view of erroneous doctrines concerning spiritual safety.

Here was a company of angels, in the very presence of God, **“who sinned.”** They did, therefore, have volition, and were capable of making a wrong choice. They were also capable of being adversely influenced, even while in heavenly realms. If this was the case with them, what may be said of men?

A vague allusion is made to this event in the book of Job. **“He puts no trust even in His servants; And against His angels He charges error. How much more those who dwell in houses of clay”** (Job 4:18-19, NASB). Jude also refers to this occasion. **“And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day”** (Jude 6). The devil himself is included in the category of **“angels.”** He was an **“anointed cherub,”** appointed as a guardian of some sort (Ezek 28:14). Yet, he **“sinned”** and was therefore **“cast out”** of **“the mountain of God”** (Ezek 18:13-18). He first sought to **“exalt”** himself above the throne of God (Isa 14:12-14). Because these latter texts (Ezekiel and Isaiah) are addressed to the **“prince of Tyre”** (Ezek 28:2) and the **“king of Babylon”** (Isa 14:4), some have erroneously concluded they have no reference to Satan. Thus, they diffuse the texts of their power, and ascribe to these earthly potentates attributes that extend beyond human potential. The true view of the texts is that the rulers being rebuked were motivated by the devil, and possessed his character. Thus God spoke to them just as though they were the devil himself--much like Jesus did to Peter in Matthew 16:23.

The book of the Revelation associates the expulsion of Satan and his angels with the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rev 12:3-12).

These fallen spirits (Satan and his angels) are reserved to condemnation, with no possibility of a change of status. Peter says God has **“delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.”** Jesus said there is an **“everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”** (Matt 25:41). There is not the slightest chance they shall escape it!

Although roaming the earth, they are confined to a state of spiritual blindness and depravity. This horrid underworld knows there is a time appointed when they will be judged for their corruption. Recall the demons who said to Jesus, **“Have You come here to torment us before the time?”** (Matt 8:29). The character and state of the devil and his angels are fixed!

The Spirit uses this example to warn us of eternal consequences. In the fall of **“the angels that sinned,”** choice was involved. They also entered into a condition that was unchangeable. Even though several millennia have passed since their fall, their judgment is not sleeping. It only remains for the appointed time to arrive. How solemn a warning to false prophets!

## THE FLOOD BROUGHT UPON THE UNGODLY

**“ . . . and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly.”** The flood of Noah’s day continues to be a reminder of an aspect of God too often forgotten. The flood occurred approximately 2,245 years after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden, and 290 years before Abraham. That **“ancient world”** did not have the advantages the false prophets of Peter’s reference had. There was no law, as commonly conceived, **“from Adam to Moses.”** Although men died as a consequence of sin, their **“sins were not like the transgression of Adam”**—i.e., they did not transgress a commandment (Rom 5:14). Notwithstanding, the sin of humanity became so pronounced, **“the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth”** (Gen 6:6, NKJV). Carnal men cannot conceive of such a thing occurring.

Although God is **“merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth”** (Ex 34:6), He cannot abide sin. He tolerated the deteriorating condition of His offspring for well over 2,000 years—but the time of reckoning came! This is the point Peter is making: that although it appears God has grown tolerant, and His judgment has fallen asleep, such is not the case at all. He therefore adduces the flood as an example of this.

In Job’s day, Eliphaz the Temanite, referred to the flood (roughly, around the time of Abraham): **“Will you keep to the old way Which wicked men have trod, Who were cut down before their time, Whose foundations were swept away by a flood?”** (Job 22:15-16). The Psalmist alluded to the flood in Psalm 90:5. The Lord Jesus paralleled His return and the judgement of the world with the flood (Matt 24:38-39; Lk 17:26-27). In Hebrews 11:7, the Spirit affirms that Noah **“condemned the world”** by building the ark. In his First Epistle, Peter established that Noah was **“saved”** by the same waters that destroyed all flesh (1 Pet 3:21).

In the flood an entire race was destroyed, except for eight people. This unparalleled destruction was due to sin—sin that was not a violation of a specific law. By way of contrast with that wicked world, Noah is called **“a preacher of righteousness.”** This is the only place in Scripture where reference is made to Noah being a **“herald”** (NRSV). Instead of appealing to the sinful lusts of people, as do false prophets, Noah spoke of righteousness. He was not heard by the decadent masses, but neither was he destroyed with them. Noah stands as an example of a solitary man against a world.

The salient point being made by the Spirit is needful. God has not changed. No aspect of His character has been lulled to sleep with the passing of time. He has consistently revealed Himself as totally intolerant of sin, and has therefore provided a way of escape from it. **For men to corrupt this message of salvation, leaving men in their sin, is a transgression of greater magnitude than that of the fallen angels, or of the world that perished in the flood.** It is an affront to the Almighty, a reproach to the Lord Jesus Christ, and a trampling of the blood of the covenant. It simply is not possible for something to be more serious than corrupting the Gospel, whether it be by men on earth or angels in heaven (Gal 1:8-9).

## LESSON #13

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

***“ . . . and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds); then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment”*** (2 Pet 2:6-9, NKJV).

### INTRODUCTION

Peter, carried along by the Holy Spirit, is writing so his readers will be able to remember the truth AFTER he has passed from this life (1:15). Because of his union with the Lord, he has a deep concern for the proliferation of erroneous doctrine, seeing it as a most serious and dangerous circumstance. Lest believers grasp a fleshly view of God, the Apostle underscores the Lord's total intolerance of ungodliness and false teaching. Having reminded us of the global judgment of the flood, he now turns to a provincial circumstance in which the Divine character was revealed.

### THE OVERTHROW OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

***“ . . . and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly thereafter . . . ”*** (NASB). There are several epochal events mentioned in Genesis. The GLOBAL judgment of the flood, the PROVINCIAL judgment at the tower of Babel in the plain of Shinar, and the LOCALIZED overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. Peter now focuses on the awesome judgment that took place upon the cities of the plain (Gen 19:29). This is an extraordinary display of Divine indignation, teaching us to take departures from the truth seriously, and to be intolerant of sin.

These cities had become so corrupt, an outcry against them had reached into heaven itself (Gen 18:20). Their sin was especially ***“grievous,”*** or grave, and thus heavenly messengers were sent to determine the validity of the cry against them (Gen 18:21). On the way, the heavenly messengers stopped to share their mission with the ***“friend of God,”*** Abraham (Gen 18:16-17). On this occasion, Abraham reasoned with God about sparing the city for the sake of the righteous (Gen 18:26-32).

These ungodly cities were ***“condemned”*** to ***“destruction”*** by the Lord—counted unworthy of existence. We learn from Scripture that the men of the city were wholly given over to homosexuality, which is given the name ***“sodomy”*** because of this very city (Deut 23:17; 1 Kgs 14:24; 15:12). While some contemporaries object to this affirmation, it is made quite clear in the Word. Seeking to have intimacy with the ***“men”*** (actually angelic messengers who visited Lot), ***“the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter”*** (Gen 19:5-11)—a remarkable display of depravity!

The Lord reduced these cities ***“to ashes”*** in an unparalleled extermination. Of that occasion it is written, ***“Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone (sulphur, or burning stone) and fire from the LORD out of heaven, and He overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground”*** (Gen 19:24-25). We understand this is the area now covered with the Dead Sea—an epitaph to the depraved. Of this occasion Jude writes, ***“Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire”*** (Jude 7). There can be no question about the nature of the sin of these cities. ***“Gross immorality”*** and ***“strange flesh”*** (unnatural) were indulgences God would not allow to continue, even among sinners—to say nothing of among saints.

Remember, Peter has declared false prophets would enter in among God's people, promoting the flesh and gratifying fleshly lusts. He therefore adduces Sodom and Gomorrah as examples of those who pursue the flesh. It is inevitable that such will taste of the wrath of God. Unless they are extricated from their moral dilemma, like Lot was from Sodom, they too will suffer the vengeance of eternal fire. You will nowhere find sympathy for such depraved people in Scripture. They are particularly reprehensible.

### THE RESCUE OF RIGHTEOUS LOT

***“ . . . and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds) . . . ”*** (NASB). There are few men of Scriptural record who have been maligned as much as Lot. All do well to avoid such views of this man—particularly since the perspective of God has been revealed. He is called ***“righteous Lot,”*** and none dare to call him anything else! Say what you will about this man, he was saved from ***“eternal fire.”***

The Spirit apprizes us that when strife arose between the herdsman of Abraham and Lot, Lot chose ***“all the plain of Jordan,”*** which was ***“well watered everywhere”*** and ***“as the garden of the Lord”*** (Gen 13:10-11). The impact of Sodom upon Lot is remarkable. He was ***“oppressed,”*** and caused to suffer because of the conduct he beheld—before the law, before the Bible, and before the prophets. What he ***“saw”*** and what he ***“heard”*** caused torment to his soul. The sight of lawless deeds and the sound of lawless words were a DAILY grief to him. In this Lot towers above contemporary *Christians* who have grown so accustomed to moral depravity they can tolerate it without speaking against it. But it was not so with Lot! He lived ***“among them,”*** but he could not bear them! They were like thorns in his side.

The men of Sodom had not grown accustomed to Lot either. When they surrounded his house, and sought to deal perversely with the heavenly messengers he entertained, they spoke derisively of him. ***“This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge; now we will treat you worse than them”*** (Gen 19:9, NASB). My heart cries out, *O righteous Lot, I am thankful to God for your righteous testimony! You have been an inspiration to me, and I am jealous for your exoneration among foolish and deceived theologians.* Here was a man—a righteous man—who lived in the midst of uncleanness. His ears were polluted with the sounds he heard. His eyes daily observed deeds that dishonored God. His soul was tortured with the deeds of these sinners.

And why does the Spirit adduce such an awesome example when dealing with the rise of false prophets? Because the people of God must seek to be similarly affected by sensual religion—an approach to the faith that places the accent upon flesh. If such an accent incurred the wrath of God against uncovenanted Sodom, what do you suppose will be the portion of those who dare to wear the name of His Son, yet feed upon the flesh? The very presence of those who corrupt the truth for personal advantage must become a burden to our souls—a source of oppression to our spirits. If such are a burden to the Lord, how dare any one learn to live accommodatingly with them!

We may also learn from this example, that apparently favorable choices are often attended with great grief and sorrow. Those who determine to mold their lives around fleshly advantages—like the well watered plain—will find there are accompaniments to such choices that are extremely difficult to live with. Should we fall into that category, may we join with Lot in a righteous revulsion at the sights and sounds of godlessness!

### THE LORD KNOWS HOW!

***“ . . . then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.”*** (NASB). Peter did not want false prophets to come—nor does any godly person—but he knew it was going to happen. Therefore, he holds the Divine perspective of the situation before the people. Although circumstances may seem impossible and hopeless, ***“the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation.”*** We know this by affirmation and by example (Lot). He can ***“rescue the godly from trial”*** (NRSV). This is a most comforting thought! Well did the Psalmist say, ***“But know that the LORD has set apart for Himself him who is godly; The LORD will hear when I call to Him”*** (Psa 4:3). He delivers the righteous ***“out of all their troubles”*** (Psa 34:17). When in them, therefore, the righteous must ***“wait patiently”*** for the Lord! Deliverance is on the way. Even though it seems improbable, the Lord ***“knows how”*** to rescue them. Who could ever have conceived of Lot being rescued from Sodom? But the Lord knew how to do it, and did it!

It is a principle of the heavenly Kingdom that God will **NOT** allow us to be seized by uncommon temptations, or those bringing stress beyond what we are able to bear (1 Cor 10:13). That situation presumes deliverance, or rescue. It comes, we are told, in the form of a ***“way of escape”***—like that of Lot from Sodom. Those who teach an impersonal, or merely academic view of spiritual life, rob the people of this perspective. In all of its aspects, whether initial salvation or deliverance from temptation, the hand of the Lord is upon His people. Overwhelming odds against us are only a delusion. He that is in us is greater than he that is the world (1 John 4:4).

God also knows how to ***“reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment”*** (NKJV). They may appear to be in the majority, and to dominate now—but they are ***“reserved . . . under punishment;”*** i.e., it is just a matter of time until they will be punished. Literally, they are ***“under punishment awaiting judgment.”*** Not only is this true of those in this world, it is also true of the unseen world. Demons, for example, know there is a coming ***“time”*** when they will be tormented (Matt 8:29). The rich man of whom Jesus spoke in Luke 16, was reserved until the day of judgment (v 24).

Jesus taught those who did not embrace the Son were in a dreadful circumstance. They were ***“condemned already,”*** and ***“the wrath of God”*** was abiding upon them (John 3:18,36). In every way, the ungodly—particularly those who pervert the Gospel—are in ***“slippery places”*** (Psa 73:18). Their flourishing is only ***“for a season,”*** and will soon come to an end. Sodom appeared to fair well for a while, but her day came. Such will be the lot of everyone who sets themselves against the Lord and His Christ.

The knowledge of these things assists the people of God to be patient while they are oppressed. In this awareness, they can keep the faith even though they are grieved by their surroundings. The accounts will all be settled. The faithful will all be delivered. When, therefore, you are ***“vexed”*** and oppressed because of the words and conduct of the unrighteous, remember Lot. God knows how to deliver you too—and He will!

## LESSON #14

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

***“ . . . and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.”*** (2 Pet 2:10-11, NKJV).

### INTRODUCTION

The Spirit elaborates on the real nature of false prophets. Although they come with cunning flattery, fair speeches, and smooth words, they are not what they appear to be. The basic postulate of this treatise is this: *those who seek their own interests cannot profit the people of God*. Too, we are to behold, in the presence of such imposters, the aggression of the evil one. He will spare no activity to corrupt the people of God. He knows full well the reaction of God to corruption and defilement, both moral and spiritual. If, then, Satan can lure us into corruption, he has achieved his objective. It behooves the people of God to be wise concerning his devices.

### THEY WALK ACCORDING TO THE FLESH

***“ . . . and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority . . . ”*** (NASB). It is unfortunate that the word ***“flesh”*** has been decidedly neutralized among believers. I take this as evidence of aggressive Satanic activity. The word ***“flesh”*** carries a variety of meanings in Scripture. It denotes humanity itself, as in Genesis 6:3,12 and Matthew 16:17. It also is used for the meat of animals, which is eaten (Ex 12:8). The word is also for the external part of our natures—our body (2 Cor 4:11). The body of Jesus, consigned for a while to the grave, is called His ***“flesh”*** (Acts 2:26). The Lord Jesus speaks of another realm, however, when He refers to His ***“flesh”*** as meat, or food, for the soul (John 6:54-56). In all of these texts, precisely the same word is used. Yet, they do not all have the same meaning.

The Holy Spirit has attached special significance to the word ***“flesh,”*** using it to denote the part of us that is not born again. It includes more than the body, being immediately connected to sin. This is the part of us that comes ***σαρκί*** is employed. The development of this concept is found in the Apostolic doctrine. The KJV often uses the word ***“carnal”*** in translating this word. The NIV, seeking to interpret the word, translates it ***“the sinful nature”*** (NIV). The TEB translates it ***“human nature,”*** JB, RSV ***“sinful passions,”*** and NEB ***“lower nature.”*** The remainder of the standard translations use ***“the flesh.”***

This is the unregenerate part of our beings, for which there is no hope. It is not changeable, and is therefore rejected by God. Jesus affirmed this when He said, ***“That which is born of the flesh IS flesh”*** (John 3:6). This condition necessitates the new birth.

With unusual precision and power, the Spirit establishes, ***“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God”*** (Rom 8:7,8). There is nothing in this part of our constitution that is ***“good”***—nothing at all (Rom 7:18). This is to be acknowledged by all.

Little wonder Peter speaks with such a note of alarm. These false teachers are walking and teaching in a state of unregeneracy. They have nothing to offer that will do anything but anger God. They offer no food for the soul, no heavenly perspective, and no hope. Their total appeal has to do with THIS world, as they are ignorant of the world to come.

Such feed their ***“flesh,”*** or unregenerate nature, and propagate a religion that does the same. Notice that the ***“desires”*** of the flesh—all of them—are ***“corrupt.”*** The ***“flesh”*** is like a rotting corpse, and all that is attached to it, whether intellectual or emotional, carries that same corruption. To fortify the condemned part of our beings is wrong in every sense of the word. To perpetrate a religion that does this is detestable beyond imagination.

It should not surprise you that ***“flesh”*** dominates so much of what comes in the name of the Lord. It is associated with this world, and this one alone. That is all the devil has to offer, and he does it with spiritual militancy. The very mention of the word ***“flesh”*** is to put us in a state of alertness.

### THEY ARE NOT AFRAID TO SPEAK EVIL

***“ . . . Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties . . . ”*** (NASB). The KJV uses ***“presumptuous”*** for ***“daring.”*** Other versions use ***“bold.”*** This describes an assertive nature that ignores all Divine warnings, and is insensitive to spiritual surroundings. It is an outspoken and confident spirit that supposes there are no obstacles or opponents except those that are seen. This is an attitude that can take hold of the best of us. Let us pray with David, ***“Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me”*** (Psa 19:13). When ***“flesh”*** dominates, men are bold to take matters into their own hands, whether it is the chief priests against Jesus, or Peter cutting off the ear of Malchus. Flesh is brash, and especially when it is sanctified by religion.

**“Self-willed”** has a foreboding ring to it. This is the exact opposite of the Spirit of Christ, evidenced when He prayed, **“NOT my will . . .”** (Lk 22:42). One of the qualifications of an overseer is, **“not self-willed”** (Tit 1:7). This is a characteristic that results from ignoring the Word, stifling the Holy Spirit, and focusing upon things that are seen. Simeon and Levi, sons of Jacob, were noted for violence committed in **“their self-will”** (Gen 49:5-6). Self will is opposed to anything and every one that contradicts it—even the Lord Himself.

These false prophets do not recognize any authority but what they imagine themselves to have. They operate in a realm dominated by the seen, and even speak derisively of those with greater authority and power than themselves. The ultimate example of this is found in those who opposed, and finally condemned to death, the Lord Jesus Christ. Here was **“God manifest in the flesh”** (1 Tim 3:16). Yet. They thought nothing of charging He cast out demons **“by Beelzubub, the prince of demons”** (Matt 12:24). Others said He had a demon (John 7:20), and was a **“Samaritan”** (John 8:48). Even upon the cross, His enemies chided Him, mocking Him, and holding Him in derision.

How is it that such cruelty and malignment can come from the mouths of men? It is because this is the nature of the flesh. It despises **“government,”** which, in the Kingdom of God, requires the crucifixion of the flesh. But **“flesh”** refuses to die, and repudiates the very notion of crucifixion or subjugation. Now do not miss what the Spirit is saying. This frame of spirit has penetrated the religious realm. Even if God Almighty declares certain traits must characterize spiritual leaders, these false prophets refuse to subscribe to the Divine will. Like those who crucified Jesus, they will not have the Lord to **“reign over”** them (Lk 19:14).

Boasting themselves to be somebody, these men speak derisively of powers greater than themselves, whether seen or unseen. They do not consider the world to come to be superior, and deride the idea of focusing upon it. They do not fear at the thought of angels hearing them, as men are admonished to do (Eccl 5:6). It is not possible to overstate the seriousness of this condition. A powerless form of godliness would be introduced that would allow for the rejection of Divine authority, whether direct or appointed. It would also permit the exaltation of self-will, and the opposition of everything opposing it. It would allow for **“flesh”** to remain prominent.

### THE RESPONSE OF ANGELS

**“. . .whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord.”** (NASB). Abusive language is never right! Here we are introduced to an aspect of the Kingdom that is rarely mentioned in our time. The verse before us is against the backdrop of the Sovereignty of God. All power, whether spiritual, political, or otherwise, is derived from God. That is involved in the expression, **“For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God”** (Rom 13:1). Our faith in God will compel us to not deride such power.

Our text particularly focuses on unseen powers, mentioning that angels themselves acknowledge power, or authority, as coming from God. These messengers are **“greater in might and power”** than we mortals, and we do well to learn a lesson from them. Scripture reminds us they **“excel in strength,”** and **“do”** God’s **“commandments”** (Psa 103:20). Even though they occupy lofty positions in heavenly places, they do not bring **“reviling judgment”** against other powers. The KJV says, **“railing accusation,”** referring to intemperate outbursts of self-will.

Jude provides an example of angelic conduct when dealing with this very subject. **“Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee”** (Jude 8-9). This is our only reference to this notable occasion, and I am grateful it is provided for us. It helps to temper the outbursts of flesh from those made **“a little lower than the angels.”** Think of the magnitude of this expression. Michael is a **“chief prince”** among heavenly beings (Dan 10:13,21). It was revealed to Daniel that this mighty angel **“stands guard over”** the people of Israel (Dan 12:1). He would, then, have particular interest in the **“body of Moses,”** great leader of the Exodus and wilderness wanderings of this covenanted people of God.

We do not know why Michael disputed with the devil about the body of Moses. You will recall God **“buried”** Moses, with the place never being known by any one else (Deut 34:5-6). Knowing the maliciousness and hatred of Satan, I can imagine how derisively he must have spoken to Michael. But Michael did not engage in contemptuous and disdainful speech. Rather, he said, **“The Lord rebuke thee!”** leaving the matter with God.

I cannot help but think of the pretentious ways in which I have heard people speak of Satan. It is not that we should have respect for him—and that is not why Michael referred him to God. It is that Satan has his power from God, and this God alone is able to successfully rebuke him. Speech that is inflamed by the flesh is never right, nor is the derision of authority.

The involvement of the soul with God goes far deeper than the average person thinks. At no point are the saved allowed to operate on their own, or take matters into their own hands. A religion that allows for such abuse is a false one, and will lead men to perdition. True faith compels the individual to forfeit his own will in preference for the good and acceptable will of God.

## LESSON #15

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

***“But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children.”*** (2 Pet 2:12-14, NKJV).

### INTRODUCTION

This section of Second Peter brings home to our hearts the seriousness of misrepresenting God, perverting His Gospel, and seeking self-gain through purported identity with Jesus. While the text may seem unusually negative to the novice, Peter is not merely lashing out in fleshly anger against people with whom he disagrees. This is the Spirit of God within Him, expressing Divine revulsion when truth is corrupted and the Divine agenda ignored. Through Peter, the Spirit is affirming a time when flesh will assert itself freely in the very presence of God's people. A dreadful time, indeed!

### MADE TO BE DESTROYED

***“But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed”*** (NASB). The language is so arresting, it jars upon the soul. One might suppose this to be a flagrant contradiction of the Divine injunction, ***“speak evil of no man”*** (Tit 3:2), and ***“Do not speak evil of one another, brethren”*** (James 4:11). When a person maintains a large distance between himself and the Lord, words like this cannot be received. These are uttered from the Spirit, not the flesh, and are expressions from the heavenly sanctuary, not the earth. They form a Divine assessment of the destiny of all who dare to tamper with the truth, corrupting it and exploiting the people of God for personal advantage.

Think of it – religious teachers called ***“unreasoning animals,” “brute beasts”*** (KJV, NIV), or ***“irrational animals”*** (RSV). Though appealing to reason to promote their covetous practices, they are called ***“unreasoning.”*** By this, the Spirit means they are driven by the flesh, which is not recognized by God. Thoughts proceeding from the flesh, or the ***“wisdom of this world,”*** are only imaginations, and are counted ***“foolishness”*** with God (1 Cor 3:19). The strength of this expression, ***“brute beasts”*** (also used in Jude 9), is found in its literal meaning ***“without reason.”*** These teachers are so overcome by the flesh that they are counted as nothing more than mindless creatures.

Here are leaders and teachers who prate against the truth of God, about which they know nothing—i.e., ***“speak evil of the things they do not understand”*** (NKJV). Their propensity to the flesh has hidden the things of God to them, causing them to appear ***“foolishness”*** (1 Cor 2:14). Although their railing includes corruptions of the Gospel, the particular reference here is to casting aspersions on personalities in the angelic realm. Suffice it to say, men should speak with a sense of overwhelming astonishment of the demise of angels. Jest about such a thing is unbecoming and dangerous. That is the immediate point the Spirit is making. But the religion of these false teachers has made them oblivious to this circumstance. Like a narcotic, their theology has put them into a state of spiritual sleep, in which they have no true reason. No wonder it is written, ***“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die”*** (Rom 8:13). How this perspective is needed in our time!

The destiny of these teachers is ***“destruction.”*** Like beasts without rationality, that is the only reason for their existence. **The further people get from spiritual reason, the closer they come to destruction.**

Where a lack of knowledge about eternal things exists, and to the degree that it dominates, ***“eternal destruction”*** looms large! The KJV and NKJV read, ***“shall utterly perish in their own corruption.”*** The idea is that destruction is the natural consequence of their unreasonable religion. To put it another way, they sowed to the flesh, and therefore ***“shall of the flesh reap corruption”*** (Gal 6:8). There is an appointed outcome for every posture of life. It is not possible to avoid this outcome. Those who choose to follow the dictates of the flesh—especially in the name of Christ—cannot escape the determined consequence of that choice. I ask you, is this not a solemn consideration?

### CAROUSING SPOTS AND BLEMISHES

***“... and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you”*** (NKJV). The phrase ***“wages of unrighteousness”*** is a reference to the mysterious prophet Balaam, as confirmed in verse 15 (***“following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness”***). There is, however, a different perspective in this verse. The reference here is to the **REAL** wages for unrighteousness, not the temporal ones sought by Balaam and his spiritual progeny. These ***“wages”*** fall into the broader category of Romans 6:23: ***“the wages of sin is death.”*** Once again, there is an appointed outcome for both righteousness and unrighteousness, and the outcome cannot be avoided.

The expression “*carouse* (riot, KJV) *in the daytime*” is an intriguing one. It reveals the extent to which delusion can permeate the soul. **This is the Spirit’s modest reference to sensuality.** The language is strong, yet is not explicit, so as not to inflame the desires of the flesh. There are several perspectives to be seen in this phraseology. **First**, these men indulge the flesh eagerly, as though today was the last opportunity they had to fulfill its lusts. **Second**, their indulgence is short-lived—only for the day. The “*night is coming*” (John 9:4). **Third**, and preeminent, these false teachers are worse than ordinary pleasure seekers. Generally, pleasure seekers reserve their indulgences for the night. As it is written, “*For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night*” (1 Thess 5:7). But these men, emboldened by their corrupt religion, feed their lusts in the daytime, without restraint—openly and without shame.

As corrupt as these men were, they were among the godly—in their presence, and attending their gatherings. Jude elaborates, saying they were “*spots in your feasts of charity*” (Jude 12). These were love-feasts in which believers joined together in a mutual affection for Christ and one another. It was the outgrowth of the early church, that “*did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart*” (Acts 2:46). In such gatherings, these men were rotten “*spots*”—distracting corruption that would defile the whole assembly. They were also “*blemishes*,” making the gatherings weak and with flaw.

Note, these intruding teachers indulged their appetites openly and without fear while among the saints. Among other things, this reveals the dreadful affects of their religion. They now retained no consciousness of the sharp conflict of their manner with that of the godly. Like “*brute beasts*” they wandered among men without respect or fear.

It is a fearful day when those wearing the name of Christ degenerate to such a state as to allow the intrusion of such men. You may recall that Jesus sharply rebuked the church in Thyatira for allowing a corrupt teacher to promote her indulging ways among them (Rev 2:20-23). It is time for the church to draw so close to God as to make such men offensive and repugnant to them. **Peter gives no word about recovering such men, or making an attempt to restore them.** There are some evils too malignant to be around, and these men represent such a condition.

### CHILDREN UNDER THE CURSE

“*. . . having eyes full of adultery and that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children.*” (NASB). The expression “*never cease from sin*,” is stated with more strength in the KJV and NKJV versions: “*cannot cease from sin.*” The RSV says, “*insatiable for sin.*” Robertson, in his word studies, says this means “*unable to stop.*” The unceasing action described, therefore, is owing to a state of reprobacy, from which recovery is not possible. The language of this verse confirms this to be the case. Mind you, this is not the assessment of men, but of the Living God. It is not a license for us to go about, pronouncing eternal judgment upon teachers. After all, “*There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?*” (James 4:12). The Spirit is here affirming a very real condition that exists among very real people—individuals whose very religion leads them, and those who follow them, into condemnation. In such, there comes a time when recovery is no longer possible. I find this to be a most sobering consideration!

These false teachers are aggressive to bring others into their corruption. They, like their father the devil, use beguilement, or deception. They lure souls into condemnation by telling them they will gain advantages by what they have to offer. And what kind of people do they attract? “*Unstable souls!*” These are immature and unsettled people, whose roots have not yet grown deep. They live on the surface of life, and see only cursory issues. While all believers begin in this state, they dare not remain there. “*Unstable souls*” are the target of these reprobate teachers. That very fact should compel every child of God to “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Pet 3:18). It is never safe to be spiritually simple!

The heart, or basic constitution, of these teachers, is “*trained in greed*”—cultured to satisfy the lusts of the flesh. Sinful indulgence is not the exception with them, but the rule. They do not struggle against the flesh, but are dominated by it. The realm they have chosen and prefer is cursed.

The ascription given to them is startling: “*cursed children.*” Other Scriptural expressions depicting this state are, “*son of perdition*” (John 17:12), “*children of wrath*” (Eph 2:3), “*children of disobedience*” (Eph 5:6), “*sons of Belial*” (Judges 19:22), and “*children of the wicked one*” (Matt 13:38). Admittedly, we have all come from such a condition—but it is different with these false teachers. They have **again** descended into the pit from which they were extracted, returning like a dog to its vomit. **Again**, they have crucified the Son of God, putting Him to an open shame. For them, “*it is impossible . . . to renew them again to repentance*” (Heb 6:4-6). They are “*vessels of wrath prepared for destruction*” (Rom 9:22), and “*reprobate concerning the faith*” (2 Tim 3:8).

As great and serious as wicked worldly trends are, corrupt religion is even more dangerous. You can sense this in the gravity of the language used by the Spirit in this text. This situation calls for a hearty appetite and love for the truth, unceasing spiritual growth, and closeness to the Lord. This posture will assist us in detecting and avoiding corrupt influences.

## LESSON #16

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

*“They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever” (2 Pet 2:15-17, NKJV)*

### INTRODUCTION

The Spirit continues to reason concerning the presence and effectiveness of false teachers. While it may appear morose to dwell upon such things, because of the nature of Satanic deception, it is imperative that we do so. There is a fierce battle for the souls of men going on. If any disinterest in this battle exists, it is **only** among men. There is **no** apathy in heaven about these matters, nor are the forces of hell indifferent about them. Because we have been called into this fierce conflict, the Spirit is reasoning concerning our involvement in it. We are to be aware of our spiritual surroundings.

### THE RIGHT WAY FORSAKEN

*“ Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray.”* (KJV). The Spirit now informs us these false prophets are not unacquainted with the ways of God. At one time, they were in *“the right way,”* but were turned from it. Elsewhere, Paul traces this defection to demonic influences. *“In the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron”* (1 Tim 4:1). At some point, these pretending teachers removed the *“whole armor of God,”* becoming vulnerable to Satanic influences. They did not take seriously the commission to *“walk in the Spirit,”* live *“by faith,”* and *“take heed”* to themselves and what they taught (Gal 5:16; Heb 10:38; 1 Tim 4:16).

There is a *“right way”* and a false way; a strait way and a broad way. In this case, the word *“way”* does **not** mean *manner, habit, or custom*, i.e., way of doing things. It is not a subjective, or experiential, word, but a subjective one. It is a *road*, or *highway*—the appointed *“way”* of getting from earth to heaven. In a Person, *“the Way”* is the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6). This is the *“highway”* God has lifted up in the desert, upon which the unclean may **not** travel (Isa 35:8). It is the road upon which Satan and his evil hierarchy cannot travel. Still, they prowl at its edge, seeking to lure men off the highway, into the sloughs of sin and degradation that are on either side of it.

From the standpoint of fellowship, this *“right way”* includes the Father, the Son, the angelic hosts, and the spirits of just man made perfect (Heb 12:22-24). From the standpoint of benefits there are continued cleansing, the leading of the Spirit, and participation in the Divine nature (1 John 1:7; Rom 8:12-13; 2 Pet 1:4). From the standpoint of environment, this is a way filled with *“light,”* in which the redeemed are privileged to walk (Psa 56:13; Isa 2:5; Eph 5:8; 1 John 1:7). Truly, God has given us heaven to go to heaven in!

But these men *“have forsaken the right way,”* turning their backs on the unspeakable advantages of life in Christ Jesus. Like Adam and Eve, they exchange a paradise for a piece of fruit. Like Judas, they deliver the Son of God to His enemies for a few pieces of silver. Like Achan, they forfeit their inheritance in Canaan for some paltry and temporal Jericho-possession.

Once they were turned aside from the way of condemnation by the wooing of the Spirit, preaching of the Gospel, and the glorious promises of God. This time, they were lured from the way to God, the way to life, and the way of acceptance. They *“are gone astray.”* See, there are no fences along the heavenly *“highway”* to keep people in. Individuals must WANT to walk on this road to remain protected by the Lord and inaccessible to the devil. But these false prophets *“turned aside after Satan”* (1 Tim 5:15)—and they did it for a few of the world's fading baubles.

For them, the covetousness of the old man rose to dominance. They did not *“mortify”* it, as God demands (Col 3:5-6). As soon as the flesh dominated, the benefits of salvation appeared small and inconsequential, so they left the way. Those who consider it impossible to forsake *“the right way,”* do well to ponder these iniquitous teachers.

### THE WAY OF BALAAM

*“ . . . following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet”* (KJV). Throughout Scripture, there are individuals who stand as noble and ignoble examples for the rest of humanity. God points to them as concrete examples of human possibilities. Balaam is such an one. He was a prophet during the wilderness wanderings of Israel (Num 22-24). Balaam was lured from the right way by Balak, king of the wicked Moabites. From the high places of Baal, he showed Balaam the *“extent of the people”* of the Moabites (Num 22:41). At that time, Balaam prepared seven altars for sacrifice to the Lord, and God spoke to him. Some of Balaam's words are most remarkable (Num 22:38; 23:3,8-10,12,19-24; 24:3-10).

But, alas, speaking the very words of God was not sufficient to keep Balaam in the right way! His heart remained covetous. It is written that he *“loved the wages of unrighteousness.”* At one point, Balaam even said, *“Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more”* (Num 22:18). Yet, Balak offered to promote Balaam to great honor, giving him whatever he asked, to divine against Israel. Finally, Balaam agreed to return with the negotiators to Moab. At that time, *“God’s anger was kindled because he went”* (Num 22:22). On his way, the angel of the Lord blocked the way with a drawn sword, ready to kill Balaam. The donkey on which he rode saw the angel, but Balaam did not. Turning aside, the donkey went into a field, but Balaam struck her and turned her back into the way. Again, seeing the angel, the donkey pushed against the wall, crushing Balaam’s foot. Although she was struck again, the donkey finally fell down, refusing to go further. Aroused with anger, Balaam struck the donkey with his staff. It was then that the infamous discussion between the donkey and Balaam took place (Num 22:28-30). God used the donkey’s reasoning to open Balaam’s eyes to the angel, thereby forbidding *“the madness of the prophet.”*

We later read that Balaam’s counsel (that Balak lure Israel into fornication) was actually overturned (Deut 23:4-5; Josh 24:9-10; Neh 13:2). Notwithstanding, Balaam’s name went down in infamy, because he chose to bring a curse upon Israel for profit—*“wages of unrighteousness.”* Make no mistake about this, Satan offers advantages to those who will follow him—but they are only *“for a season.”* How different was the response of Moses, who lived at the same time as Balaam (Heb 11:24-26).

These false prophets bring a curse upon the people of God with their wicked and indulgent teaching—and they do it for *“wages,”* or personal benefit. For them, *religion* is a means to prosperity and fleshly satisfaction. They give heed to Satanic influences because of what they are offered. Satan always does this—he did with Ève (Gen 3:5), Moses (Heb 11:26), and the Lord Jesus Himself (Lk 4:6-7). We should not be surprised that he continues this tactic to this very day. Incidentally, a significant amount of contemporary Western *Christianity* is dangerously close to, if not in, this category.

### THEY ARE NOT A SPIRITUAL SOURCE

*“These are springs without water, and mists (clouds, KJV) driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved”* (NASB). These are not **unpopular** teachers—*“many will follow their destructive ways”* (2 Pet 2:2). These wicked leaders rise to prominence, becoming well known for what they teach. They are specialists in the world order, knowing nothing of the *“heavenly places,”* which they have forsaken.

The Spirit acknowledges these *“false teachers”* are sources—they **do** bring something. How appropriate the description, *“springs (wells, KJV) without water.”* In the spiritual realm, they yield only dust for dry and parched souls. Hungry and thirsty souls who sit under them return *“with their vessels empty”* (Jer 14:3). Jude reminds us they are *“clouds without . . . late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots”* (Jude 12). The *“brooks”* they bring, like those of Job’s *“friends,”* are an illusion that bring no satisfaction (Job 6:14-16). They are experts in rhetoric, but miserable failures in supply spiritual resources for the people of God.

They are *“clouds,”* or *“mists,”* that appear to carry the promise of rain, nourishment, and refreshment for the soul. They appear on the horizon of time, but soon vanish away, carried away by a sudden tempest. Rather than bringing refreshment, they are introductions to storm, trial, and harm. What is more, in the time of storm, they offer no consolation or assistance for the saints. **The very difficulties that require spiritual nourishment are the circumstances that drive these waterless clouds away!**

The language of the Spirit is precise, revealing the appointed destruction of those who, in the name of Christ, traffic in the flesh. *“Blackest darkness is reserved for them”* (NIV). *“. . . for them the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved”* (RSV). *“. . . for them the deepest darkness has been reserved”* (NRSV). *“. . . for whom the black darkness has been reserved”* (NASB). Hell is no more equal in all of its parts than heaven. The wicked will not have equal punishment any more than the righteous will have equal reward. Eternal, or outer, darkness has a *“blackest”* part—a *“deepest”* segment! There is such a thing as *“greater condemnation”* (Matt 23:14; Mk 12:40; Lk 20:47), and it is retained for those who exploit the people of God for personal advantage. In fact, it is, according to our text, *“reserved”* for such ruthless imposters.

Herein is revealed the absolute seriousness of spiritual life. Those who take it upon themselves to tamper with truth, manipulate the saints, and fatten their coffers in the name of Jesus, have not escaped Divine attention. Unless rescued from their condition—for which no promise is made—they will go to the blackest part of hell. This is a place reserved for those who once knew the truth, abandoned it in favor of the lie, kept a nominal identity with Christ, and even assumed to teach and lead His people.

False teachers, the Spirit informs us, will come, bringing *“damnable heresies.”* Their doom, however, is sure, and every child of God must determine to know and avoid them. The salvation of our souls is at stake, and safety may only be found in the *“love of the truth”* and cleaving to Christ.

## LESSON #17

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

***“For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage” (2 Pet 2:18-19, NKJV).***

### INTRODUCTION

The Spirit’s extended dialog on false teachers accentuates the jeopardy their presence creates. Because they operate under the influence of Satan, they are subtle with supernatural shrewdness. No believer is capable of withstanding them in the energy of the flesh. Only spiritual maturity—growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15)—provides safety from this generation of vipers. It is necessary to emphasize that the thought of a massive departure from the truth was alarming to the Apostles. It is unfortunate that men have grown so accustomed to the presence of such imposters, it no longer causes alarm among professed believers. Spiritual sleep, nevertheless, is lethal.

### GREAT SWELLING WORDS OF VANITY

***“For speaking out arrogant words of vanity . . .”*** (NASB). The KJV reads, *“great swelling words,”* the RSV *“loud boasts,”* the NRSV *“bombastic nonsense,”* and the NIV *“empty boastful words.”* The idea is of words that are bulging over with size, but have no spiritual content—like a balloon full of air. They take up a lot of space, but bring no resources to the soul. They do not clarify the things of God, alert the soul to the vanity of this world, or develop an appetite for ***“the things of the Spirit of God”*** (1 Cor 2:14). They are often interesting, entertaining, and amusing—but God cannot use them. They are incompatible with the heavenly agenda, and fastens one to the cursed order. Of such words David wrote, their ***“tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. Thou lovest evil more than good; and lying rather than to speak righteousness”*** (Psa 52:2-3).

Elsewhere, the Spirit refers to such words as ***“smooth words and flattering speech”*** (Rom 16:18), ***“enticing words of man's wisdom”*** (1 Cor 2:4), ***“vain words”*** (Eph 5:6), ***“enticing words”*** (Col 2:4), ***“flattering words”*** (1 Thess 2:5), and ***“feigned words”*** (2 Pet 2:3). Such words have zero Kingdom value, and contribute nothing to the soul. I must admit that much of the preaching I have heard falls into this category. The words offer no deterrent to sin, no edification for the Spirit, and no clarification of the Person and accomplishments of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must ever remember, ***“For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power”*** (1 Cor 4:20). The NASB reads, ***“For the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power.”*** Preachers of the Word are not mere speech-makers, orators, or rhetorical wizards. While they may possess gifts of speech, that is not their power. **Men are not moved toward God by the sound of words, but by the power of truth!** This is why Paul devoted himself to the clear proclamation of the Gospel, in words taught by the Holy Spirit. How different from the false teachers of whom Peter warns us. ***“And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God”*** (1 Cor 2:4-5).

Kingdom preaching is accompanied by ***“the power of the Spirit of God”*** (Rom 15:19). The ***“words”*** employed to declare the mind of God are selected words—words originating with the Spirit of God. As it is written, ***“These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual (words)”*** (1 Cor 2:13). Humorous little anecdotes do not fall into this category, to say nothing of words that allure to the flesh, causing the soul to gravitate to the cursed order.

We must learn from this section of Scripture that when men’s words are not right, their message is not right. **Flawed speech is an inappropriate and unacceptable container for the truth of God.** Men who come to us in the name of the Lord, yet speak with swelling, or puffed up and empty, words, are not men of God at all. Their message does not come from God, and is to be rejected, along with their claim to being messengers from God.

### LUSTFUL ALLUREMENTS TO ESCAPED ONES

***“ . . . they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error”*** (NASB). ***“Fleshly desires,”*** or ***“lusts,”*** are the sphere or realm in which these pretentious speakers live. It is the domain with which they are familiar, and therefore they speak of it. It is a condemned realm, to be sure, but they choose to live in it anyway, because they are uncomfortable in ***“heavenly places.”*** Their field of expertise is not the Word of God, and many of them will even admit to that deplorable condition. **Teachers that are unfamiliar with God’s Word are imposters!**

The terms ***“fleshly desires”*** and ***“sensuality”*** are broad terms. While they include baser sins like fornication, adultery, drunkenness, etc., they are not confined to them. ***“Lusts”*** of the flesh are longings of the unregenerate nature, and ***“sensuality,”*** or wantonness, describes an incontinent state, where flesh cannot be controlled. The earthly part of man’s constitution is preeminent in these sins. Knowing this, the devil uses his ministers to concoct an approach to religion

that encourages the satisfaction of the flesh rather than the crucifixion of it.

The Spirit solemnly warns us of living under the domination of the flesh. ***“Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts”*** (Rom 13:13-14). Throughout the history of the church, the wreckage of lives that did not take this seriously are strewn. In our day, when *having fun* and *being entertained* have obtained such importance in the church, the door has been opened to the type of teachers Peter is denouncing. Such wicked men cannot enter into the solemn environment of godliness and a fervent quest for heaven! It is with great sorrow that we must acknowledge the raising of a generation that cannot stand a diet of the Word of God. Unless there is some form of entertainment and sundry outlets for the energy of the flesh, few have an interest in the things of God. **Unless the individual is delivered from such delusion, there is no hope of being saved.**

Identifying a time of great spiritual peril, the Spirit described the rise of flesh to a place of domination—all within the context of religiosity. ***“For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”*** (2 Tim 3:2-4). These, we are apprized, have a ***“form of godliness,”*** but reject its ***“power”*** (verse 5). The solemn injunction: ***“from such people turn away.”***

How is it that such a condition developed? Why would people choose to retain a form of godliness, while living in the flesh? This is the wake caused by the prophets of which Peter warned us. The deluded ones were introduced to a ***“form of godliness”*** that permitted them to live in the flesh, while imagining they could also enjoy the benefits of salvation. One other note: these were not far from the line of escape. **They were taken in because they were living too close to the condemned realm!—“barely escaped!”**

### THOUGH SLAVES, THEY PROMISE FREEDOM

***“ . . . promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved”*** (NASB). From the beginning, Satan has offered humanity something. To Eve he pledged, ***“For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”*** (Gen 3:5). Nothing could have been further from the truth. Notice, Satan approached the very offspring of God. At the threshold of human history, our adversary made known his intentions—bring down the people of God!

It is no marvel, therefore, that Satan’s army includes religious deceivers. As it is written, ***“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works”*** (2 Cor 11:13-15). Although they hold freedom out to the people, they are not free themselves. Enslaved to fleshly passions, their sin taints their message. Some of these teachers wrested the teaching of Paul, affirming the more we sin, the more grace we receive. Of such, Paul wrote, ***“And why not say, ‘Let us do evil that good may come’?; as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just”*** (Rom 3:8). As Peter said elsewhere, these prophets were guilty of ***“using liberty as a cloak for vice”*** (1 Pet 2:16). They sanctified their lusts with religion—a heathen trait!

The phraseology employed by the Spirit is exact and challenging. ***“They themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.”*** The word ***“corruption”*** includes the idea of *destruction*. The thought is that such men are riveted to the cursed order, and will perish with it. Paul said exactly the same thing in Romans 6:16. ***“Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?”***

What shall we say to these things? The teacher living in the flesh has nothing to offer us. Living under the domination of the ***“flesh,”*** or ***“natural man,”*** disqualifies a person from Divine service! Such are ministers of Satan, for that is his realm. Such are not free, nor can they bring freedom to others. Peter is alerting believers to coming conditions in order that they might exercise themselves to close the door to such intruders. Every child of God is obligated to so live as to repel such meddlers. As the ***“pillar and ground of the truth”*** (1 Tim 3:15), the church is to culture an environment that discourages the entrance of pretenders. This cannot be done by catering to the flesh, watering down the Word of God, and making things comfortable for sinners. Such will only invite Satan’s brigade of false prophets to gain access to weak believers, not far removed from the place of escape. That this is not being done on any significant scale in our country ought to be obvious. Those who continue to condone weak and insipid presentations of the Gospel are responsible for the entrance of teachers who are enslaved, and enslave, to sin.

## LESSON #18

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

***“For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.’” (2 Pet 2:20-22, NKJV).***

### INTRODUCTION

Although the possibility of falling away is heavily debated in the religious world, the Holy spirit speaks with remarkable clarity on the subject. We will find there are very understandable reasons why this danger exists. There are also very real Divine resources that will enable the believer to avoid such a tragedy. If salvation involves **“eternal life”**—and it does—we are dealing with **eternal** issues. They must not be approached as though discussing mere theological points and differences.

### ESCAPING THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

***“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”*** (KJV). The nature and effect of false prophets are still under consideration. Not only are they individuals who have fallen away, they cause others to do so. To make it clear the Spirit is not speaking of those who merely profess allegiance to Christ, the subjects in question are referred to as having **“escaped the pollutions of the world.”** We are not, then, speaking of pretenders, or people who, as some say, were *never really saved*. Salvation involves an escape from the condemned order, and identity with the Lord Jesus. Both are mentioned in this text. Neither of these can be accomplished apart from the new birth. To postulate that a person could escape the pollutions of the world and know the Lord without being born again, is utterly absurd.

The **“pollutions of the world”** are very real, and are to be energetically shunned by every believer. The contaminating effects of these pollutions are what thrust us into a condemned state. The state of the condemned is described as **“defiled and unbelieving”** (Tit 1:15). Those promised they will walk with Jesus in white are described as having **“not defiled their garments”** (Rev 3:4). These are the defilements of the condemned order. Unless an effective escape is realized from them, salvation is not possible.

How does one **“escape”** these pollutions. They are all around us, being energetically promoted by the powers of darkness. The escape route is appropriately said to be **“through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”** Although the human intellect is involved, this is not intellectual knowledge. It is spiritual knowledge, which includes personal acquaintance and involvement with the Lord Jesus Christ. It depicts a condition in which the believer is **“joined to the Lord”** (1 Cor 6:17).

This **“knowledge”** is the sphere in which the believer lives—like the atmosphere is the realm in which our **“earthen vessels”** subsist. Viewed objectively, this knowledge is **“eternal life”** (John 17:3), in which we are effectively united with the Source of life—the Lord Jesus. It is this effective union that enables us to **“escape”** the pollutants of this world. Without it, escape is not possible.

This knowledge is full and personal—i.e., there is no aspect of life excluded from its influence and power. This is nothing less than **“the knowledge of the Son of God”** (Eph 4:13), the aim of every believer (Phil 3:10). Here is a rich well of spiritual satisfaction and power (Col 2:2), and is one of the primary benefits of being born again (Col 3:10).

The knowledge of God—or personal involvement with Deity—cannot be maintained at a distance. It protects only those who sustain their association with the Lord. As soon as a distance forms between the individual and God, participation with Him begins to dissipate. This is a living relationship, not a static one. Only this knowledge can bring about an escape from the contamination of the world.

We are speaking of false teachers who once knew this blessing, but fell from it – and of their disciples who also had fallen from this lofty place.

### AGAIN ENTANGLED AND OVERCOME

***“For if . . . they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first”*** (NASB). If this condition were not possible, it would be preposterous to have extended teaching about it. Mind you, we are speaking of individuals who **“escaped”** the pollutions of the world, again being entangled in Satan’s net. This entanglement did not happen inadvertently. Through spiritual stupidity and dullness of soul, the transgressor **“entangles himself”** (2 Tim 2:4). Just as God’s Word is **“active,”** so is Satan’s delusion. If men choose to live at a distance from Christ, they do, by that very decision, move closer to the ensnarements of the wicked one. There is just as much danger in the world as there is safety in the Lord Jesus Christ. All men do choose which habitat that will occupy.

This word brings to mind the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. After their departure, Pharaoh mistakingly reasoned, **“They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in”** (Ex 14:3, KJV). Other versions substitute **“bewildered”** (NKJV) **“confusion”** (NIV) and **“aimlessly”** (NASB, NRSV) for

**“entangled.”** There is an element of truth to all of them. The **“entanglement”** in reference is a term describing the powerful grip of delusion—a state in which the mind is thrown into spiritual confusion. The individual who once escaped the world’s contamination now reasons personal advantages can be realized by it. This is even worse than the delusion experienced by Eve, for she had never yet escaped. Here, however, is someone who has already **“escaped,”** flirting with impurity, and finally overcome by it. All sound reason departs, and Jesus becomes incidental.

Think of the descriptive expression—**“and overcome.”** Myriads of professed believers do not think such a thing is possible. I remember a word my beloved mother told me: **“If what is above you does not control you, what is around you will!”** To put it another way, **if you are not an overcomer, you will be overcome!** Jesus affirmed He had **“over come the world”** (John 16:33). Here is a state where someone once joined to Him is overcome **by** the world. Instead of overcoming evil, evil overcame them (Rom 12:21). Though once they overcame the wicked one (1 John 2:13-14), now they are **“again”** overcome by him. It is not possible to overstate the tragedy of the situation.

The Spirit affirms, **“the last state has become worse for them than the first”** (NASB). Do not doubt that such a state is possible! To be entangled and overcome **“again”** thrusts one into a condition worse than the one prior to being born again—i.e., **“at the first”!** These are the exact words spoken by our Lord concerning someone once delivered, then brought again into bondage (Matt 12:43-45). Those who are **“again entangled”** sink lower into the mire, and further from the Savior, than they were when alienated. They are less sensitive, more calloused, and harder in heart!

God made no pledge to retrieve such, nor, indeed, has He declared recovery is even possible. Elsewhere, the Spirit affirms it is **“impossible”** (Heb 6:4-6). Wherever a sensitive conscience is found, and a will to return to the Lord, a return can be realized. Such have not yet been **“overcome.”** But if they do not run with haste to Jesus, they **will** soon be **“overcome.”**

### WHEN IT IS BETTER NEVER TO HAVE KNOWN

**“For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment that was passed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, ‘The dog turns back to its own vomit,’ and, ‘The sow is washed only to wallow in the mud’”** (RSV). The strength of these words has been neutralized by flawed interpretations. That is one of the evidences of error—it cripples the truth of God (Rom 1:18).

**There is a state that is worse than never being born again!** Jesus declared the unbelieving generation to whom He ministered was actually better off **BEFORE** He came (Matt 11:23-24; Lk 12:47; John 9:41; 15:22). If **exposure** to the Son of God left those rejecting Him in a worse condition, what can be said of those who embraced Him, then returned to the world??

Notice, these have abandoned **“the way of righteousness”** and **“the holy commandment.”** The righteous way was once **“known”** by these people. They were perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1). The **“holy commandment”** was **“delivered”** to them—i.e., they were aware of the nature of God, and of His requirement for holiness (Heb 12:14). The call has gone out from the Throne of the universe, **“Be ye holy, for I am holy”** (1 Pet 1:16).

**The command of the Lord is itself holy, and it demands and promotes holiness!** No person can remain under the sound of the Word of God without becoming acutely aware of His demand for holiness. The failure of men to be holy necessitating the death of the Lord Jesus. It also demands that men be **“born again.”** Additionally, it requires that a diligent effort be made to **“perfect holiness,”** bringing it to full expression in our persons (2 Cor 7:1; Matt 5:48; Eph 4:12,13; Phil 3:12-15; 1 Thess 3:13; 4:7).

Peter has introduced us to teachers who, of their own volition, **“turned from the holy commandment.”** When such a **“turn”** is made, only the defilement of the flesh remains—the **“pollutions of the world.”** Although, when we are born again, **“old things pass away,”** the world with its pollution remains. It has all of the entangling and enslaving power it ever had. Safety exists **only** in the **“knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.”** There is no protection outside the perimeter of Divine fellowship! **If men do not press toward the heart of spiritual life, they will drift toward the world’s pollution.** I am persuaded this is generally unknown in the churches.

The people of God are **not** in a spiritual vacuum. They are still subject to evil influences, and are quite capable of being again ensnared by the wicked one. This does **not** mean salvation is inadequate, or that the Savior is weak and incapable of bringing you to glory. It **does** mean Divine power is experienced **only** by those who **“walk in the light as He is in the light”** (1 John 1:7). No person, however astute in Bible knowledge, and disciplined in living, is capable of laying hold of eternal life (1 Tim 6:12) apart from consistent involvement with Christ Jesus. **Salvation is only effective within the context of Divine fellowship!** O, that this truth were more widely declared and embraced! I fear we are in a time when a view of salvation is being promoted that does not require consistent and persistent involvement!

## LESSON #19

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

*“Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts” (2 Pet 3:1-3, NKJV).*

### INTRODUCTION

Peter has written two times to his readers—and particularly to us, upon whom *“the ends of the world are come”* (1 Cor 10:11). In both, he seeks to promote solid Kingdom-thinking. He does not veer away from either warning or comfort, the words of false prophets or the words of Jesus. His aim is to equip the saints, in accordance with the revealed objective of the Lord (Eph 4:11-16). He knows that an ill-equipped church will be overcome by the wicked one. He also knows that an unthinking person is a vulnerable person. We do well to hear the *tone* of Peter’s words as well as their content.

### STIRRING UP PURE MINDS

*“This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance”* (KJV). The diligence that characterized Moses, the Prophets, and the Apostles, is noteworthy. When called into the purpose of God, they connected with an aggressive effort to save humanity. *There is nothing casual about the Divine initiative to reconcile the world to God.* Suffice it to say, casual or half-hearted efforts have no place among those wearing Christ’s name, although common today.

Twice Peter has written to those who are in Christ Jesus. Confirming his messages are for *all* the people of God, he addresses them to the *“elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ”* (1 Pet 1:1), and *“those who have obtained like precious faith”* (2 Pet 1:1). It is good to remember that, while Epistles are written to specific individuals or congregations, they are for all of the redeemed, and are relevant to the life of faith. No view of Scripture should be tolerated that makes it provincial.

The manner in which the Spirit moves Peter to address the saints is instructive: *“I stir up your pure minds.”* He does not adapt his message to the *“natural men”* (1 Cor 2:14) or the *“carnal mind”* (Rom 8:7). He knows the capacity of even the redeemed to think in manners unbefitting for saints, and thus speaks to their *“pure minds.”* He does not question whether they have such a mind, but speaks to them as though they do. If you wonder how to speak to people with *“pure minds,”* Peter’s letters are a case in point.

What is a *“pure mind?”* First, it is something the saints possess—*“YOUR pure minds.”* Second, it is a mind characterized by a lack of defilement—*“your PURE minds.”* Third, it has to do with thought, contemplation, purpose, and understanding—*“your pure MINDS.”* This involves the *“pure heart”* and *“clean heart”* of which the Psalms speak (Psa 24:4; 73:1). In particular, this is the part of our beings capable of reflection and contemplation. A *“pure mind”* is a mind that dwells upon *“pure things”* (Phil 4:8). This is a mind occupied with holy considerations.

A *“pure mind”* is not something believers *should* have. It is something they *DO* have. This is *“the mind of Christ,”* received in regeneration, and cultured and matured in sanctification. It is a capacity to joyfully receive and thoughtfully consider the Word of the Lord, and every believer possesses it. This mind, however, is in competition with *“the mind of the flesh,”* which also cleaves to us like the horseleach, demanding our attention (Prov 30:15).

Every communication to which we are subjected speaks to one of these minds—Peter speaks to *“pure minds.”* He speaks so as to arouse the Divine nature in which we participate (2 Pet 1:4). He labors to awaken the *“new man”* given to us in the new birth. This is necessary because of our present condition. Our *“pure mind”* must be stimulated and challenged before it becomes productive. O, that such stirrings were more prevalent among the people of God! It is no wonder so little progress is evident in the contemporary church. Their *“pure minds”* have not been awakened.

### THE WORDS TO BE REMEMBERED

*“That you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior”* (NKJV). How is it that our *“pure minds”* are *“stirred up?”* Here we confront a Kingdom principle of great importance. It is *NOT* by motivational speeches, entertainment, or institutional challenges that saints are stirred! Although these appear to be the dominant approach to inspiring people today, they have no place whatsoever in the reign of Jesus. However, these efforts cannot reach the *“pure mind,”* which slumbers through their cunning presentations. Self-proclaimed successful motivators have no value at all unless they have revitalized *“pure minds.”*

What are the people of God to consider? The spirit focuses on two categories of *“WORDS.”* He does not say to remember duties, but *words*; not occasions, but *words*. *“Pure minds”* are revived by *words*, not rhythms; by *words*, not sights and sounds. Peter *“stirred”* up the new nature by two letters; by a forthright message that reflected

the **“mind of Christ.”** Peter was routing the thoughts of the saints—bringing them to consider certain words. He states they were **“the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior.”**

First, it should be evident that the Apostles and the Prophets were in harmony. Their message was a single message, and their focus a solitary focus. After all, the church is **“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets”** (Eph 2:20). That assumes a commonality of objective. Sound mindedness requires the consideration of the words of both the Prophets and the commandments of the Apostles. The Prophets declared what was coming, and the Apostles elaborated upon what had come. They both did it in **“words which the Holy Spirit teaches”** (1 Cor 2:13).

Like Jude, Peter’s message was a warning about spiritual decline. Although both preferred to speak about the **“common salvation,”** what loomed on the horizon constrained them to sound the **warning—to “blow the trumpet in Zion”** (Joel 2:1,15). This is not a morose message, but a needful one. God’s people must not only live for the moment, but also prepare for the future. The hedonist, who seeks pleasure above all, knows nothing of this.

Spiritual thinking is not automatic. While the **“new man”** thrives on the things of God, he must be challenged to take hold of them. No better way for this to be accomplished than to remember what the Prophets said, as well as what the Apostles commanded. The lamentable condition of the average church can be traced, in part, to its lack of familiarity with the **“words of the Prophets.”** Their words are still food for the hungry and godly soul!

Notice, Peter refers to **“the Apostles of the Lord and Savior.”** He does not speak of ecclesiastical authority, or as one that has dominion over our faith. The Apostles are **“ambassadors for Christ,”** delivering His message, and His commands (2 Cor 5:20). Peter summons men only to remember what God has spoken. He recognizes no other message as suitable for contemplation. He knows the new creature can only thrive on God’s Word.

### SCOFFERS IN THE LAST DAYS

**“First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions”** (RSV). Stirring up our pure minds, Peter calls us to a *primary* consideration: **“you must understand this FIRST.”** He used this same terminology earlier: **“knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation”** (1:20). This is a phrase meaning *this is something that must be known!* On matters of critical importance, the **“I don’t understand”** syndrome is our of place.

Godly thinking has a focus, or beginning point, and cannot be done randomly. The Spirit reminds us if we are to make any progress in the Kingdom, we are to understand this **first**, that scoffers are coming. **We have not been called into spiritual isolation!** While we have surely been seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6), we also occupy the domain of the enemy. We are not to suppose scoffers **MIGHT** come, but that they **WILL** come! We are not talking about possibilities or probabilities, but of realities.

The Spirit directs us to a consideration of **“the last days.”** While this expression is used of the time following the exaltation of Jesus, and concluding with the end of the world (Acts 2:17; Heb 1:2; James 5:3), this is not the meaning here. Paul also spoke of these days, referring them to the concluding period of the day of salvation (2 Tim 3:1). As time winds down, so will the spirits of men decline. Powerful preaching will, in a significant measure, be replaced by scoffing and ridicule.

The particular category of deceivers he mentions is **“scoffers.”** More common words in Scripture for this sort of individual are **“scorner”** and **“mocker”** (Psa 1:1; Prov 29:8; Isa 28:14; Gen 19:14; Acts 17:32). It is someone who speaks in derision about a revealed matter. Such men speak derisively about the very things Peter mentions—i.e., the rise of false prophets, the coming of the Lord, and the end of the world. They see no relevance in these subjects, and thus speak disparagingly of them. I cannot begin to tell you how much of this sort of thing I have encountered in recent years.

A key description of these purveyors of derision is, **“walking after their own lusts.”** They are not following the Divine agenda, but are riveted to their own. They lead men with *this world* in mind, and their own desires being prominent. Because of their distorted focus, these men are Christ’s enemies. Of such men the Spirit witnesses, **“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame; who set their mind on earthly things”** (Phil 3:18-19). The **“commandment”** of the Apostles concerning such men is clear. **“Mark them . . . and avoid them”** (Rom 6:17), **“from such withdraw thyself”** (1 Tim 6:5), **“from such turn away”** (2 Tim 3:5) and **“reject”** (Tit 3:10). All who do not take seriously the Word of the Lord are to receive no hearing among His people. The reason should be obvious: the Lord does not work through their message, but the devil does. Let us devote ourselves to most sober thinking concerning these things.

## LESSON #20

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

*“And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished” (2 Pet 3:4-6, NKJV).*

### INTRODUCTION

The Holy Spirit now comes to grips with the nature of all false representations of the Gospel – a trait that characterizes all false prophets. Both false prophets and their doctrines root in this world, and constitute a denial of its temporary nature. While Jesus has **“delivered us from this present evil world, according to the will of God,”** these men leave men comfortably ensconced in the condemned realm. With persuasive words from heaven, Peter now launches into a powerful constraint for godliness. He points us to **“the end,”** and leaves no place for spiritual diversion.

### WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING?

*“Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation”* (NKJV). Here is a characteristic that will be prominent in the **“last days”** of which Peter speaks. The coming of the Lord will no longer be viewed as **“the blessed hope”** (Tit 2:13), nor will **“waiting for His Son from heaven”** (1 Thess 1:10) be considered integral to regeneration. In the time of Malachi, sinful men wearing the name of the Lord spoke similarly. **“Where is the God of judgment?”** (Mat 2:17). Such wicked men, whether in Malachi’s day or **“the last days,”** cannot conceive of a God that intrudes into the affairs of men. These are the days of pragmatic or empirical views: i.e., unless it can be perceived with the senses NOW, it really has no relevance to us. Pertinence, in such a view, has nothing whatsoever to do with what is coming. It is the **“here and now”** that matters to all false prophets, and is essential for all false doctrines. This is in direct conflict with the Person and purpose of Christ!

Jesus plainly declared He is coming again (Matt 16:27-28; 24:27,30; 25:12-13,31; 26:64; John 14:3, etc.). Paul also proclaimed the message of Christ’s return far and wide, never omitting it is his preaching (Acts 17:31; 1 Cor 1:7-8; 4:5; Phil 3:20-21; Col 4:5; 1 Thess 4:16-17; 1 Tim 6:15; Tit 2:13; Heb 9:28). Peter (Acts 3:20-21), James (James 5:7-9), Jude (Jude 14-15), and even angels (Acts 1:11) declared the return of the Lord! Yet this resounding testimony is summarily rejected by the couriers of error. The hardening affect of sin is remarkable, defying all carnal explanation.

It is not that these men openly challenge men with the words, **“Where is the promise of His coming?”** Their message insinuates this, making the coming of the Lord immaterial and unimportant. They are like the **“fool”** who says **“in his heart” “There is no God”** (Psa 14:1; 53:1). This is more descriptive of a thought process than articulation. The doctrines of these men make no place for the return of the Lord. Such teaching constitutes a challenge to the words of Jesus and the Apostles, and is an affront to faith.

The erroneous persuasion of these men is based upon things they have observed. *Nothing has changed*, they falsely conclude, *therefore nothing can change*. The dependability of the natural order is adduced as proof that nothing will interrupt its course—at least in our time. It is the Epicurean and Deistic views of God. They acknowledge *God MAY have created the world. However, He has now left it in the control of the forces of nature, and no longer interposes, either in nature or the affairs of men.*

There is an alarming percentage of preaching and teaching in our time that is presented as though this were true—even though it may not be confessed to be the case. A gospel that does not have Christ’s return and eternity in view is no gospel at all. A doctrinal thrust that has this world as its locus, or center, disarms the soul, making it vulnerable to sin and the devil. Even though human observation may seem to justify the conclusion Peter exposes, it is condemned by God. **The Lord will have nothing to do with a teaching or a person who ignores the fact of His Son’s return!**

### THEY WILLINGLY FORGET

*“For this they willingly are ignorant of . . .”* (KJV). The KJV is more precise on this verse. Other translations say, *“it escapes their notice”* (NASB), *“willingly forget”* (NKJV), *“deliberately ignore this fact”* (RSV), and *“deliberately forget”* (NIV). Literally, the phrase is translated *“for this escapes them being willing.”* The emphasis is **WILLING**, not ignorant! That is, the **character** of the challengers is the point, not merely what it has yielded. They do not consider the truth because they do not WANT to! *Their state of ignorance is self-imposed.* The truth has flown by them, because there was no place in their heart or mind to receive it. **Their hearts were incapable of receiving the truth because of their own choice.** As clear and necessary as the truth of Christ’s return is to a believer, it cannot wedge itself into the heart of unwilling personalities.

This is another way of saying God hid the truth of His Son's return from them. Jesus Himself declared this to be a Divine attribute. ***"I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight"*** (Matt 11:25-26). He spoke those words after declaring the day of judgment to an unbelieving generation (v. 21-24). While, therefore, the unwillingness of these false prophets is self-imposed, it is not ONLY self-imposed. God Almighty has ratified their unreasonable choice by veiling the truth of His Son's return to them. They cannot consider it because their hearts and minds are not adapted to do so. Regarding Christ's return, it may be said of a wicked man ***"he has no heart for it"*** (Prov 16:17).

Of such men Jesus said, ***"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil"*** (John 3:19). That is a condition of willing ignorance! Like the reprobate Gentiles, such ***"did not like to retain God in their knowledge"*** (Rom 1:28), and therefore God ***"sent them strong delusion"*** (2 Thess 2:10). The Lord is not indifferent to the hearts of men!

The condition of these corrupting teachers has permeated their doctrine. They do not declare the coming of the Lord because it does not fit into their dogma. Theirs is a religion without power, anchored firmly to the passing order. If people receive their teaching, they will not find it in their hearts to consider the coming of the Lord. The weighty words of Jesus Himself on this matter will be brushed aside as though they were meaningless. The solemn teachings of the Epistles in this matter will be viewed as superfluous, and unrelated to the *Christian* life.

Peter is dealing with the root of the matter—going straight to the heart of the issue. Do not look at the stated objective of false teachers to confirm his words are true. Rather, listen to the trend of their doctrines, and behold their influence upon those who receive them. If they yield the fruit of a worldly life and mind-set, moving men to imagine they can live as though Jesus could not return in their lifetime, they have listened to *"scoffers."* The purveyors of such dogma are the very ones of whom Peter has warned.

## THE WORLD THAT THEN EXISTED

***" . . . that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water"*** (NKJV). Everything has NOT remained the same, even though that appears to be the case to those whose minds are set upon the world. In fact, two significant events have occurred in the world that cannot be ignored, unless done so willingly.

**CREATION.** *The creation itself involved an incredible and vast change!* Here the interposition of Deity took place. Remember, the false prophets said everything has remained the same ***"from the beginning of creation."*** Peter now shows this was NOT the case. It was not until the *third day* that God said, ***"Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear."*** It was then that the earth appeared, the seas were gathered, and vegetation originated (Gen 1:9-13). Peter says the earth was ***"formed out of water and by water"*** (NASB, NIV). The appearance of land in the creation, therefore, involved a remarkable change by the word of God. The change was so great, it continues to challenge students of scripture. Out of and by water, the earth, or dry land, was formed. Everything has not continued the same ***"from the beginning!"***

**THE FLOOD.** The cataclysm of the flood also confirms things have not remained the same. The world, once pronounced ***"very good"*** (Gen 1:31), became so corrupt with the sinfulness of men, that it was inundated with a mighty flood. This was no ordinary deluge, but a miraculous one, involving a violent disruption of the very course of nature. It was ***"by water,"*** from which the earth had been separated, that it was then destroyed. Scripture affirms, ***"all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened"*** (Gen 7:11). The NIV reads, ***"all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened."*** The massive bodies of water within the earth gushed out without restraint, and the firmament above dropped down its waters as they were before separated from those of the earth (Gen 1:6-7). For forty consecutive days this continued uninterrupted until the highest mountains on the face of the earth were covered with no less than twenty feet of water (Gen 7:20). The condition remained like that for 150 days, and took another 150 days to abate. An unparalleled CHANGE took place! Things have NOT remained the same!

The flood was mentioned in the books of Job (22:16) and Psalms (90:5), as well as by Jesus (Matt 24:38), Paul (Heb 11:7), and Peter (1 Pet 3:20; 2 Pet 2:5; 3:5-6). In addition, visible evidence is found throughout the world of that destruction. There is no acceptable reason for doubting it.

The devastation was so extensive Peter adds, ***"the world that then existed perished."*** It was not annihilated, but rendered utterly helpless and useless at that time. During the flood, the world had no utility, and was not productive. Peter will show the coming the Lord will also produce such a change. To be ignorant of Christ's return and the unrivaled changes that will accompany it propels the individual into a life of utter futility.

## LESSON #21

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

***“But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Pet 3:7-9, NKJV).***

### INTRODUCTION

One of the roots of false doctrine is the exaggeration of the temporal order. When an inordinate emphasis is placed upon this world, the individual is turned toward sin and destruction. The Spirit will now show the absurdity of anchoring our affection to this passing world. The consummation of God’s purpose involves the removal of the present heavens and earth. The obvious conclusion is that we must prepare for that time, not ignore it.

### THE HEAVENS ARE EARTH--PRESERVED FOR FIRE

***“By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire . . . ”*** (NKJV). God used His word to create the world, and to overflow it with water in the flood. That is a supreme indication of His power—His word! The phrase ***“by the same Word”*** refers more to the One Who spoke, than to what was said. It is the Origin of that Word that is the point. GOD created the heavens and earth with His Word. He also caused the earth to ***“perish”*** by means of the flood through His word.

The ***“present heavens and earth”*** are primarily a comparison with ***“the world to come.”*** While the Spirit is reminding us of the past, His emphasis is preparation for what is coming. With remarkable consistency, the Spirit and men filled with the Spirit, draw us away from this world. False prophets, on the other hand, cause us to dwell upon it.

By saying ***“the same Word,”*** the Spirit is emphasizing that it is only the grace of God that has kept Him from destroying the world again with a flood. There is still sufficient water to do it. There is also enough sin to provoke Him to do so. But presently He is sustaining and upholding the world with His Word instead of destroying it (Heb 1:3; Col 1:17). The universe, then, continues because of Divine involvement, NOT because of nature’s laws.

When we are tempted to be anchored to the realm of the seen, we are to remember it is all ***“reserved for fire.”*** God has determined to burn it up! It is not salvageable! This is not resident in the heart of the earth now, as some suppose. The natural realm will not be destroyed by its own forces, but by the Word of the Lord. The fire, like that which destroyed Sodom, will come ***“from heaven”*** (Gen 19:24).

This fire goes ***“before the Lord,”*** Who Himself is a ***“consuming fire”*** (Deut 4:24; Heb 12:29). The destruction will occur when the Lord comes again. It is HIS GLORY that will invoke the destruction by fire. This is the meaning of Revelation 20:11. ***“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.”***

The consuming fire is nothing less than Divine glory, to which the universe will finally be exposed. When God ***“shows”*** the Lord Jesus, He will be seen in ***“His glory”*** (Matt 25:31), attended by ***“the glory of the Father His angels”*** (Matt 16:27). In the blaze of that unveiled glory, the natural order will dissipate. The defiled realm will confront the undefiled Lord!

The Psalmist alluded to this destruction in the fiftieth Psalm. ***“Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent; A fire shall devour before Him, And it shall be very tempestuous all around Him”*** (Verse 3). An ultimate confrontation of God is scheduled, and the universe will not survive it!

This is the clearest prophecy of the conclusion of the natural order, although the prophets frequently referred to it (Isa 66:15; Dan 7:10; Mal 4:1). The spirit also witnesses in the writings of Paul, ***“the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire . . . ”*** (2 Thess 1:8). All of this is by Divine appointment, and will not be changed.

### DO NOT BE IGNORANT OF THIS!

***“ . . . being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day”*** (KJV). It is important to see that the destruction of the present heavens and earth is associated with ***“the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”*** This would have been an ideal place to affirm ***“the rapture of the church”*** is the next significant event—were that the case. Instead, the Spirit draws our attention to the destruction of the universe, relating it to the day of judgment and the condemnation of the ungodly. The ***“destruction (perdition, KJV) of ungodly men”*** is coming (Rom 2:5; Job 21:30; 2 Pet 2:9; Rev 6:17)! They are not going to be annihilated, but ***“shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.”*** This will occur ***“when He comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at in all who have believed”*** (2 Thess 1:9-10, RSV). Unlike the ungodly, believers will have ***“boldness in the day of judgment”*** (1 John 4:17), welcoming the removal of the

cursed order and the induction of the eternal one.

Here is a truth that must not escape us: **God is not subject to the law of time**, either in what He does or what He has purposed. *Time serves Him, He does not serve time*. He can take centuries to develop the consciousness of sin in man (Rom 3:19-20), then remove the transgression of the world in a few hours (Dan 9:24; Heb 9:26; John 1:29)!

There is an allusion to the 90<sup>th</sup> Psalm. ***“For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night”*** (Verse 3). God, being eternal, works within the context of **objective**, not time. The vital thing to behold is **WHAT** the Lord is doing, not **WHEN** He is doing. This is not, however, the approach of false prophets, and those who are slated for perdition. Their emphasis is **HERE** and **NOW**. Motivated by covetousness, the fulfillment of their lusts dominates them. Faith, on the other hand, fastens on to **WHAT** the Lord is doing, seeking to become participate in Divine objectives.

As soon as our hearts are dominated by time, care, or a spirit of anxiousness, rushes into the soul like a flood. It is then that men ***“fret,”*** thinking as though there were no God or Divine agenda (Lk 12:26,29; Phil 4:6; Psa 37:1,7,8; Prov 24:19). The affect of this upon the heart is evident to the sensitive soul.

The consideration of God working in accordance with objective is intended to comfort our hearts and alert us to the activity of the evil one. While God’s workings are, indeed, timely, they are always in strict accord with His designs and appointments. He delight is found in the fulfillment of His will. As we become ***“partakers of the Divine nature”*** (2 Pet 1:4), we will also delight in this. We live believing that sudden and meaningful advances can be made in a moment of time. Struggle can also ***“endure for the night.”*** But in last analysis we confess, ***“The will of the Lord be done”*** (Acts 21:14).

### THE LORD IS NOT SLOW

***“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance”*** (NIV). This may seem to contradict other Divine affirmations. ***“And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?”*** (Lk 18:7). Again, ***“For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry”*** (Heb 10:37). The cry ***“HOW LONG?”*** has often risen from the hearts and lips of the godly (Psa 6:3; 13:1-2; 35:17; 74:10; 80:4; 90:13; 94:3; Jer 47:6; Hab 1:2; Rev 6:10).

It may appear as though the Lord is ***“slow,”*** or ***“slack concerning His promise.”*** It may look as though we have been left in the crucible too long, or that the wicked are too powerful, or that the church is too weak! But this is not the case at all! God is **NOT** ***“slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness.”*** Men are ***“slow”*** in fulfilling their objectives because they are weak, have inadequate resources, and others effectively oppose them. But none of this is true of our Lord! **God is not impotent or unwilling to fulfill His commitments!**

What appears to be delay is actually Divine consideration! ***“He is patient with you*** (usward, KJV), ***not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*** In his first Epistle, Peter affirmed the ***“longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah”*** (1 Pet 3:20). Paul said He ***“endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction”*** (Rom 9:22). The same condition prevails here—***except not toward the ungodly!*** The longsuffering is ***“toward”*** the saints! We are being ***“conformed to the image”*** of God’s Son, and the work must be completed! **The environment in which the work is being done will not be removed until the work is completed!** There is a Divine agenda being Sovereignly accomplished!

Thank God, He has pledged Himself will ***“finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth”*** (Rom 9:28). You can count on this: ***“He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”*** (Phil 1:6). As David said, ***“The LORD will perfect that which concerns me”*** (Psa 138:8). No wonder Peter prayed, ***“But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you”*** (1 Pet 5:10). God is not delaying, He is working, through His Son bringing ***“many sons to glory”*** (Heb 2:10).

This has much to do with the false prophets of which Peter speaks. They are anchored in time, and care nothing for the perfection of the saints. They are neither long suffering nor unwilling that any perish. That is why they declare their flawed message. Peter, however, challenges us to obtain a Divine perspective of things. The heavens and earth are headed for a timely conclusion. We are too! ***“HIS PROMISE”*** is to dominate our hearts and minds—He is ***“not slack concerning His promise!”*** That ***“promise”*** involves deliverance from this realm into the one for which we are now being adapted.

## LESSON #22

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

***“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.” (2 Pet 3:10-11, NKJV).***

### INTRODUCTION

The consideration of the end of all things is conducive to godliness and the proclamation of the truth of the Gospel. Those who bring in ***“damnable heresies”*** (2 Pet 2:1) do not ponder the *conclusion* of the natural order. Were they to do so, it would radically modify the content of their message, as well as their lives. When men blot from their minds the fiery conclusion of the universes, there is a remarkable tendency to become riveted to the world order. This is particularly dangerous when religious teachings are formed with the seen order dominating the heart and mind.

### THE LORD IS COMING AS A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

***“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night”*** (NKJV). These words are calculated to stir spiritual alertness and sobriety within the soul. From the standpoint of faith, the child of God lives with absolute certainty about what is coming. Considering things from the perspective of time, we live in uncertainty! We know Jesus is coming, but we do not know when. We know the present realm will be destroyed, but we do not know when. Jesus is surely coming ***“as a thief in the night.”***

Our Lord spoke of His coming in this manner: ***“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect”*** (Matt 24:42-44; Lk 12:39). This is one of the constant tenets of Apostolic teaching. Wherever the truth of the Gospel has been affirmed, it may be said of those who have embraced it, ***“For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night”*** (1 Thess 5:2). To a lethargic church our Lord said, ***“Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you”*** (Rev 3:3). To an unsuspecting world, the Savior shouts, ***“Behold, I come as a thief”*** (Rev 16:15). We must not allow this message to die!

The phrase ***“thief in the night”*** does NOT denote secrecy, but unexpectedness. Some have mistakenly associated these words with a coming that is undetected by the unbelieving world. But that is NOT our Lord’s intent. His coming will disrupt, or break up, the ***“house”*** of the ungodly, robbing them of all of their treasures (Lk 12:39). The Lord coming ***“as a thief in the night”*** is said to be the occasion when ***“sudden destruction”*** comes upon the ungodly (1 Thess 5:3)—certainly not a secret happening! Jesus could return **to** heaven secretly, but He will not be able to exit that realm without it being apparent to the universe.

Even though ***“God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”*** (Verse 9), the Lord will return on schedule! His mercy saves, but it does not delay or void the day God has ***“appointed.”*** He will come ***“as a thief in the night”*** – in a time when men suppose there are ***“peace and safety”*** (1 Thess 5:3). The word ***“night”*** does not denote inactivity among men, but unawareness—a time when danger is not thought to be imminent. It will be like the days of Noah, with ***people “eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage”*** (Matt 24:38), totally unaware that destruction is at hand. Jesus likened His return to the days of Lot, wherein Sodom was destroyed. ***“Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all”*** (Lk 17:28-29). To all such, the day of the Lord will come ***“as a thief in the night.”*** But this will NOT be the case for those who look for Him (1 Thess 5:4-5).

### THE HEAVENS, ELEMENTS, EARTH, AND WORKS

***“ . . . in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up”*** (KJV). The language of the Spirit is remarkably precise and vivid: ***“pass away . . . great noise . . . melt . . . fervent heat . . . burned up.”*** This is what sin has caused! For creation itself, it will be the conclusion of the ***“bondage of corruption,”*** and the end of ***“futility”*** (Rom 8:20-21). Were it not for the sin of man, this passing would not occur.

Notice, this will occur **WHEN** our Lord comes ***“as a thief in the night.”*** His return from heaven will not only signal the gathering of the elect (Matt 24:31; Mk 13:27) and the destruction of the wicked (2 Thess 1:8-10), it will also initiate the destruction of everything that is ***“made.”*** The coming of Christ is surely the consummation of all things!

This is the destruction referred to in Psalm 102. ***“Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, And***

*the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish*" (Vs 25-26). It is the one prophesied by Isaiah. *"Lift up your eyes to the heavens, And look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, The earth will grow old like a garment . . ."* (51:6). Jesus spoke about it. *"Heaven and earth will pass away"* (Matt 24:35). John saw it occur in the vision he received on Patmos. *"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them"* (Rev 20:11).

The temporality of the heavens and earth that are *"now"* is a cardinal doctrine of Scripture. But they will not simply die of old age, as does humanity. They will be *"burned up,"* with the *"elements"* melting with *"fervent heat."* The natural order will not be able to abide an immediate confrontation with its Creator (Psa 46:6; Amos 9:5,13; Nah 1:5).

For some, this is too difficult to receive. Pointing to Solomon's observation, some conclude the earth will never be destroyed: *"One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever"* (Eccl 1:4). This, however, was an *"under-the-sun"* view, comparing the solidity of creation with the extreme brevity of man (Eccl 1:3).

When Scripture affirms *"for the things which are seen are temporal"* (2 Cor 4:18), it is not simply affirming things *wear out*, so to speak. From the standpoint of human vision, the heavens and the earth do not appear temporary at all. They seem to be solid and enduring, because their deterioration is not obvious. Their temporality is because of the appointed day of Christ's return—*"the day of the Lord."*

The absence of this perspective from a great deal of the preaching of our time is responsible for much of ungodliness in *church* circles. **It is not possible to maintain a godly demeanor without having a godly perspective!** We are challenged by the Spirit to peruse the whole creation, beholding its vastness and seeming invincibility. Then, after having scrutinized it, the Spirit thunders in our ears, *"For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, The earth will grow old like a garment . . ."* (Isa 51:6).

### WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE SHOULD WE BE?

*"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness"* (NKJV). Those with a penchant for *application* should find great delight in this text! Of course, the Spirit's *application* differs significantly from that of men. Whereas men seek to *make* an application to others, the Spirit challenges the reader to make his own!

The reasoning into which the Spirit draws us is to be the result of insight, or spiritual understanding. The KJV reads, *"Seeing . . ."* Other versions read, *"Therefore . . ."* (NKJV) and *"Since . . ."* (NASB, NIV, NRSV). The idea is that a spiritually logical conclusion follows the consideration of the inevitable demise of creation. If, therefore, this consideration is rarely, if ever, entertained, the conclusion will not be reached either. Holiness is more the result of godly contemplation than legislation or requirement. Make no mistake about this—holiness **is** required, for *"without it, no man shall see the Lord"* (Heb 12:14). However, the accomplishment of this necessity is predicated upon an acute awareness of the temporality of creation.

The word *"dissolved"* is a strong word, indeed. It means to *"set aside, destroy, pull down, or break up."* When it shall have served its purpose, the entire natural order, as it now exists, will be concluded in a fiery conflagration. John reminds us the lusts associated with the world will pass away with it (1 John 2:17). By that, he means there will be no further means of gratifying corrupt lusts. The *"pleasures of sin"* are, at best, only *"for a season"* (Heb 11:25), and thus it is unreasonable to yield ourselves to them.

In view of the coming consummation, what type of people should we be? For what should we be known? Peter does not venture to answer the question, because the answer is obvious to faith. Our entire manner of life is *"in holy conduct and godliness"* (NASB): i.e., that is the environment in which we consciously and energetically live. Among other things, this confirms Christ's return will bring a swift conclusion to indulgent living. It will also usher in the day of judgment in which a meticulous account will be given for pointless and aimless living. In that context, godliness [*"all holy conversation and godliness"* (KJV)] makes sense. Ungodliness is utterly unreasonable.

The phrase *"what manner of persons"* literally means *"of what country,"* accentuating our heavenly citizenship (Phil 3:20-21; 1 Pet 2:11; Heb 11:13-14). Now, we are citizens of heaven, having *"received a kingdom that cannot be moved"* (Heb 12:28). This transfer of citizenship was necessitated by the scheduled end of *this present evil world*. What is more, there is a certain demeanor to spiritual life—to living in this world as a heavenly citizen. Holiness, for us, is having a treasure in an earthen vessel, and letting it dominate our life. It is conducting ourselves in harmony with heaven, so we can taste of its *"powers"* (Heb 6:5).

The continual consideration of the temporalness of this world neutralizes the power of temptation, and strengthens our commitment to the Lord. But when that consideration slips from us, we move closer to the world.

## LESSON #23

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

***“Looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet 3:10-11, NKJV).***

### INTRODUCTION

The coming of the Lord and the passing of the natural order are never approached casually in Scripture. These are matters close to the heart of the believer. The appearance of Christ, and the consequent consummation of all things, are integral to faith. The child of God cannot wage a successful warfare without strong persuasions about these realities. Wherever there is vagueness, or a lack of conviction, concerning the coming of Christ and the temporary nature of the whole creation, Satan gains an advantage. His ministers achieve success in their diabolical mission when God’s people remain fundamentally ignorant of these things. We will not be able to look at the things that are **“not seen”** if we are not persuaded of the passing of the things that **“are seen”** (2 Cor 4:17-18).

### LOOKING FOR AND HASTENING THE COMING

***“Looking for and hastening unto . . .”*** (KJV). Here are two spiritual postures that are indispensable to fighting the good fight of faith. When Jesus endured His cross, despising the shame, He did so in consideration of the joy set before Him (Heb 12:2), He set the tone for the faith-life. **It is only in consideration of our glorious future the we can triumph over “this present evil world.”** While false prophets anchor us to this world, or to vain hopes, the Spirit of God uproots us from this world, preparing us for the grand transition to **“the world to come.”**

**LOOKING FOR.** This is not a casual word. It speaks of an aspect of faith—of being **“strong in faith”** (Rom 4:20). You will recall this is the only acceptable posture for the believer—particularly in view of coming consummation of all things: **“Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness.”** **“Looking”** comes from a word meaning *wait for, look for, expect, anticipate, with an element of tension arising from hope*. It is possible to be dominated by fear because of what is coming (Lk 21:26). That occurs when people are dominated by unbelief. In the case of the believer, however, faith causes the heart to ANTICIPATE the appointed conclusion of temporal things, and the revelation of the eternal order. The phraseology used to describe the reception of Jesus during His earthly ministry perfectly conveys the idea. **“And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people gladly received him: for they were all waiting for him”** (Lk 8:40). That is the idea of our text. Another use of this word in reference to the ministry of John the Baptist shows what is involved. **“Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not”** (Lk 3:15). **“LOOKING”** involves anticipation, expectation, eagerness, excitement, intensity, and an element of agitation. It is the longing of faith for the things for which salvation is preparing us.

**HASTENING UNTO.** Here is another unusually strong affirmation. The first word (**looking**) emphasizes expectation. This expression accentuates the Lord’s view of the matter, as well as our manner of conduct. Later versions say **“hastening the coming”** (NKJV, NASB, NRSV). The NIV reads, **“speed its coming.”** The KJV presents us as hastening toward the day, while the other versions represent the day as coming more rapidly toward us. Both are true. The idea is that of closing the gap between us and **“that day.”** It is a fixed day, and cannot be changed. But strong faith shortens the time, as it were, for us. Jesus taught us to pray **“Thy Kingdom come”** (Matt 6:10). John cried out, **“Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus”** (Rev 22:20). As we draw closer, faith will compel us to **“cast off the works of darkness,”** picking up the spiritual pace as the day comes closer (Rom 13:11-12). Jesus is anxious to return! It is written that our **Lord “sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting”** (Heb 10:13). His expectation is twofold: His enemies being subdued, and His people being gathered to Him. By **looking and hastening**, we join our precious Lord in that expectation.

### THE DAY OF GOD

**“ . . . looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God”** (KJV). What a strong and arresting description : **“THE DAY OF GOD!”** There is only one other place in the Bible where this expression is used: Revelation 16:14. There the **“spirits of demons”** are said to gather the kings of the earth **“to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.”** This is God’s day, because He Himself has placed **“the times or the seasons . . . in His own power”** (Acts 1:7). This is the day of ultimate confrontation, when both the enemies and the sons of God will stand before Him. It is a time that will turn to the ultimate advantage of believers, and the utmost disadvantage of unbelievers. Peter referred to it as **“the great and notable day of the Lord”** (Acts 2:20). Malachi allude to it as **“the great and dreadful day of the Lord”** (Mal 4:5). The prophets spoke of it in this manner because of their emphasis on the destruction of the Lord’s enemies at that time.

This is the time when the purpose of God shall have been brought to its fulfillment – when the Divine

intent, determined before the foundation of the world, will be fully realized. Because His purpose was administered and culminated under the reign of Jesus, this day is also called ***“the day of the Lord Jesus”*** (1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14), ***“the day of Christ”*** (Phil 1:10; 2:16), and ***“the day of Jesus Christ”*** (Phil 1:6). In verse ten, Peter refers to the same day as ***“the day of the Lord.”*** From the standpoint of those who do NOT look forward to ***“the day of God,”*** it is ***“the day of wrath”*** (Rom 2:5). Because it is the time when God will absolutely prevail and dominate, it is referred to as ***“the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.”*** Paul said this was according to ***“the Gospel”*** (Rom 2:16).

The centrality of ***“the day of God”*** causes it to overshadow all other days. The ***“day of salvation”*** is in preparation for ***“that day”*** (1 Thess 5:4; 2 Thess 1:10; 2 Tim 4:8). Faith moves us toward that day, compelling us to invest in things that will endure it (2 Tim 1:12). For this reason, it is frequently called ***“THE day”*** (Rom 13:12; 1 Cor 3:13). Only one thing will be important in that day: how does God view us!

I have often remarked to you my concern for the absence of references to this day in contemporary preaching. It is an infinitely serious matter. If the way we live is determined by our awareness and anticipation of that day, real godliness is not possible without that eager expectancy. A failure to live for the coming of ***“the day of God”*** gives the advantage to Satan. While it is possible one might not drop into deep immorality, the heart will become anesthetized to the love and grace of God. In human experience, the world enlarges as ***“that day”*** is reduced. We are vulnerable to the evil one to the degree ***“the day of God”*** is not prevalent in our thinking and desires.

It is no wonder Peter stirs up our ***“pure minds”*** by bringing us to consider ***“the day of God.”*** The Father has appointed it. The angels are awaiting it. The Son is expecting it. The whole creation yearns for it. The demons live in dread of it. What place could there possibly be for a lack of interest in ***“the day of God”*** among those who have been joined to Him?

### ACCORDING TO THE PROMISE, WE LOOK

***“ . . . wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”*** (NKJV). The ***“day of God”*** – when He is fully revealed – will bring a fiery conclusion to the entire natural order. Keep in mind, this will actually be the time when creation is RELEASED from the bondage of corruption (Rom 8:21). Its rebirth is conditioned upon the removal of the cursed order. The impersonal creation, we are told, ***“groans and labors with birth pangs together until now,”*** longing for that release.

The people of God must gain the perspective of creation, which has possessed this expectancy for nearly six millennia. Rather than allowing fear to grip our hearts at the consideration of the fiery conclusion of time, it must be seen as the time of release from all that inhibits, grieves, and is aggressive against us. Everything that is contrary to us will be unable to survive the revelation of the Lord! The environment that has proved to be such a handicap to us now, will melt with fervent heat when our Lord appears.

But we are not simply awaiting the decimation of the temporal order. That is but the prelude to the unveiling of the eternal order, for which salvation is adapting us. Not only are we ***“looking”*** for ***“the day of God,”*** we are also looking ***“for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells!”*** Though the godly have longed for such surroundings from the dawn of time, they have never experienced it in this world! Abel did not have righteous surroundings, nor did Enoch or Noah. The patriarch’s Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, together with Moses, David, and all the holy prophets, have always struggled with their surroundings. This was the experience of John the Baptist, the enfleshed Word, and the Holy Apostles. And, it remains the experience of all saints. They seek deliverance from ***“the body of this death”*** (Rom 7:24), the world and its lusts (1 John 2:17), and Satan and his children (Matt 13:41).

The new realm is coming!—the one for which we are being readied. Righteousness will ***“dwell”*** there, and will not compete with any other influences. We will be able to fully ***“express”*** ourselves without any handicap whatsoever. There will be no need for ***“the whole armor of God.”*** Men will study war no more, for there will be no enemy to fight or resist (Isa 2:4; Micah 4:3). The devil, his angels, and everything within his empire of darkness will be forever cast into the lake of fire (Rev 19:20; 20:10,14,15).

The anticipation of the new heavens and earth are an expression of faith. A failure to earnestly look for them is an evidence of unbelief. Those who believe have a longing to hear of the coming ***“regeneration,”*** when our Lord will ***“make all things new”*** (Matt 19:28; Rev 21:5). Because of the sureness of this coming newness, the thought of it brings great solace to the heart. Sufferings become tolerable in the consciousness of this coming reality. The good fight of faith, and running the race set before us, become doable and gratifying in this contemplation. Look, brethren, Look!

## LESSON #24

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

*“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” (2 Pet 3:14-15a, KJV).*

### INTRODUCTION

The coming of the Lord and the end of the world are central considerations for those living by faith. They are not mere theological novelties, to be handled with personal disinterest. Faith has uprooted us from the world, and anchored us in the heavenly realms. Our appetites have changed. Our perspectives have changed. We are a new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17), and are being adapted to *“the world to come.”* As our minds are occupied with these realities, two things inevitably occur. First, sin loses its attraction, and the power of temptation is neutralized. Second, there is a strong desire for holiness and Divine acceptance. Where these qualities are **not** found, it is **not** possible to overcome the world.

### LOOKING FORWARD TO THESE THINGS

*“Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things . . .”* (NKJV). Here is a wonderful aspect of faith—*“looking forward to these things.”* This is anticipating the Lord coming *“as a thief in the night,”* and the heavens and earth being consumed with fire. For those dominated by unbelief, these are frightening considerations. That is why the contemporary church spends little time proclaiming these coming realities. The omission of these things from preaching, however, is inexcusable. This is part of the Gospel proclamation. Wherever the good news of our returning Lord and the removal of the defiled order has been withheld, the Gospel has not really been preached.

Jesus taught the presence of disruption, calamity, and persecution is the time to *“look up”* and *“lift up”* our heads, for our *“redemption”* is drawing near (Lk 21:28). Those applying those words to the destruction of Jerusalem overlook that *“redemption”* was not associated with that judgment.

This spiritual posture is involved in looking at *“the things which are not seen”* (2 Cor 4:18). It is a preoccupation with things revealed, but presently hidden by the veil of the temporal order. Faith moves us into a realm where we *“look,”* or *“eagerly wait”* (NKJV) for *“the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Phil 3:20-21).

It is only to those who are *“looking”* for Him that Jesus *will “appear the second time without sin unto salvation”* (Heb 9:28). It is true that, in one sense, Jesus will come unexpectedly. The time of His coming is not precisely known. In that sense, He will come *“in an hour that we think not”* (Matt 24:44). Yet, there is another sense in which His coming will **not** be unexpected. Looking for, or eagerly awaiting and anticipating, His return, makes it an **expected** coming, not an unexpected one! One of the glorious benefits of faith is its preparation the recipient for the return of Christ and the end of the world. Jude referred to this attitude when he wrote, *“keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life”* (Jude 21). Looking to Jesus (Heb 12:2) involves seeing Him as a returning Lord, as well as the One Who is reigning over all right now. Grace, after all, teaches us to look for *“the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”* (Tit 2:13). Wherever this frame of spirit is not found, grace has been suppressed.

In view of this, the curse of distraction should be evident to us. Satan knows we will not be prepared for Christ’s return if our hearts are turned aside to lesser things! He will, therefore, engage in energetic efforts to divert our attention from our Lord’s return and the demise of the present heavens and earth. Our souls must be alert to this tactic—even at the minuscule level.

*Until the Lord captures our attention, He will not dominate our hearts.* It is only as He fills our vision that His glory fills our inner person, bringing illumination, hope, and peace. No individual will be adequate for living or dying who does not look for *“these things.”* Our text speaks of a sustaining, empowering, and satisfying vision—*“looking forward to these things.”* There is grace available that will enable you to have such a sustained anticipation!

### BEING DILIGENT TO BE FOUND IN HIM IN PEACE

*“ . . . be diligent to be found by Him in peace . . .”* (NKJV). We are living in an erratic culture—one in which hesitancy, instability, and superficial living are actually encouraged. Those involved in the work of the Lord are well aware of the difficulties associated with rallying a group of devoted people for Christ. Accommodation is the mother of contemporary religion, compromise its father, and lethargy its offspring. Such things are not acceptable, and ought not exist.

*“Diligence”* is imperative in the Kingdom of God! It is a personal responsibility placed upon every child of God. **“BE DILIGENT!”** Scriptural synonyms for *“diligence”* include *endeavor, labor, and study*. It is descriptive of an energetic and focused effort—one that is sustained and consistent. This is the posture in which we present ourselves to God (2 Tim 2:15). It is also the way in which we endeavor to enter the rest prepared for us (Heb 4:11). Our calling and election can be made sure to our hearts only within the framework of *“diligence”* (2 Pet 1:10).

And what is to be the focus of our diligence? ***“To be found of Him in peace!”*** This is ***“peace”*** in the fullest sense of the word—with God and man. First, our peace with God is to be maintained. Our justification began by us being placed in a state of ***“peace with God”*** (Rom 5:1). That ***“peace”*** was procured at great cost, even the ***“blood of His cross”*** (Col 1:20). That peace, however, must remain central within our hearts. This is a vital aspect of the Kingdom of God (Rom 14:17). It involves delight in the presence of the Lord and a hunger and thirst for righteousness. When preeminence is given to being found by Jesus ***“in peace”*** we are walking by faith (2 Cor 5:7). It is walking in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7), not quenching the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19), and fighting the good fight of faith (1 Tim 6:12).

Second, this involves the people of God being at peace among themselves (1 Thess 5:13). Disruptions among believers move the coming of the Lord into the background of thought, making people unprepared for it. Keeping the unity of the faith in the bond of peace (Eph 4:1-2) is infinitely more than a mere law for the preservation of a united effort for Christ.

Third, it is a state of heart wherein we have exercised ourselves to be at peace with all men as much as possible (Rom 12:18; Heb 12:14). Where needless friction is cultured, the heart grows cold toward God, and the coming of the Lord becomes inconsequential. Consistent effort is required to be ***“peacemakers,”*** who will be called ***“the children of God”*** (Matt 5:9).

This is to be our status at the appearing of the Lord: ***“found of Him in peace.”*** We do not want the Lord returning, only to find us in a state of carnal agitation! How often we must remind ourselves of this truth! Even though we are born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward (Job 5:7), it had better not be trouble of our own making! No child of God can afford to be distracted from a consistent anticipation of the return of Christ Jesus! The clear implication is that it will be a decided personal disadvantage for our Lord to return and find us outside of the perimeter of peace—in any sense!

### CONSIDERING THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD

***“ . . . without spot and blameless and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation . . . ”*** (NKJV). It is not enough to be found ***“in peace”*** when Jesus returns! We must also be found ***“without spot,”*** not having the spot that ***“is not the spot of His children”*** (Deut 32:5). You may recall that the expression ***“without spot”*** is applied to the Lord Jesus Himself, particularly as regards His atoning death (Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 1:19). Salvation is calculated to make us like our Lord, enabling us to keep His ***“commandment without spot”*** (1 Tim 6:14). After all, pure religion before God and the Father includes the believer keeping ***“himself unspotted from the world”*** (James 1:27). Jude reminds us there is such a thing as ***“hating even the garment spotted by the flesh”*** (Jude 23). I find this to be a most unusual thing among professed believers in this time.

And how is it that the child of God is to be found ***“without spot?”*** This great salvation includes provision for continual cleansing, praise the Lord! ***“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”*** (1 John 1:9). ***You must not allow your sin to keep you from God!*** While we do not welcome sin into our lives, ***“If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us”*** (1 John 1:10). Now, it will require diligence on your part to remain ***“clean.”*** Salvation, is not an erratic experience, where we are in and out of the Kingdom from day to day—and that is not the point of this text. Sin, however, has a dulling influence upon the soul. If we do not deal with it in a timely manner, we become insensitive to God, and unconcerned about forgiveness. That is what contributes to the day of the Lord catching us unawares! We started out ***“clean”*** and ***“washed,”*** let us stay that way!

Our condition is also to be one of blamelessness when the Lord returns. What a strong word this is: ***“BLAMELESS!”*** It is often set before us as something to be attained and maintained (1 Cor 1:8; Phil 2:15; 1 Thess 5:23). ***It means God Himself finds nothing to criticize in us!*** Do you dare to believe such a condition is possible? As it is written, God is ***“is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy”*** (Jude 24). It is gloriously true, there is provision in Christ to pass the scrutiny of the Almighty! May it ever be said of us, ***“as He is, so are we in this world”*** (1 John 4:17).

If all of this seems too good to be true, ***“consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.”*** His goodness leads to repentance (Rom 2:4), and He is not willing that any of us perish (2 Pet 3:9). ***The seeming delay of Christ’s return must not lull us to sleep, but put us to work!*** This is the ***“day of salvation”*** in which Divine provisions may be obtained in abundance. They are all calculated to prepare us for the return of the Bridegroom, and our ***“gathering together unto Him.”*** Everything God requires of us is found in His salvation. It is all accessible to us through Christ Jesus. That is another way of saying our ***diligence will be joined to Omnipotence!*** No conscientious effort to be ready for Jesus’ return will be in vain!

## LESSON #25

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

*“ . . . even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Pet 3:15b-16, KJV).*

### INTRODUCTION

The end of all things, and the necessity of our preparation for that conclusion, is a common thread throughout Scripture. Regardless of the condition of the church, the social climate in which it functioned, or the political surrounding in which it found itself, this message was always central, always relevant, and always declared. The lack of its presentation today is an indication of spiritual decline—a falling away. At the point the coming of the Lord, the end of the world, and our readiness for them, cease to be central, we have been overcome by the wicked one. In such a circumstance, delusion has set in, and the danger of condemnation exists.

### OUR BELOVED BROTHER PAUL

*“ . . . as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you”* (NKJV). Your familiarity with the Word of God will confirm the rarity of this type of text. The apostles did not make a practice of referring to each another. Normally, *“the Apostles”* were referenced as a group, and not individually (Rom 16:7; 1 Cor 4:9; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 2:20; 3:5; 1 Thess 2:6; Jude 17). This emphasized their appointed function in the body above their persons—a pattern that is consistent throughout Scripture. Were religious men today to be judged by their contribution to the edification of the saints, suddenly the *“first would be last, and the last first.”*

Peter’s reference to Paul reveals the superiority of faith and the power of the love of the brethren. You will remember Paul once *“withstood”* Peter *“to the face,”* because of his withdrawal from the Gentiles for fear of the Jews (Gal 2:11-21). Peter’s association with Paul was not after the flesh, and therefore that occasion did not drive a wedge between them. As it is written, *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend”* (Prov 27:6). Those in Christ Jesus have centered their lives in Him, not themselves or one another. Therefore, they can speak candidly with each another about matters pertaining to the Kingdom of God. How exemplary Peter is in this regard.

Paul referred to Peter in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5). He also referred to John once in Galatians 2:9. To my knowledge, no reference is made to any of the other Apostles. This does not reduce their office one whit. It does, however, show that all were not ranked alike. Paul referred to *“the very chiefest apostles,”* or *the most eminent apostles*, (2 Cor 11:5; 12:11). The Apostleship of Peter and Paul is mentioned because they were appointed to head up the Gospel initiative. It is stated this way in Galatians 2:7-8. *“But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles) . . .”*

It was this condition that made Paul a *“beloved brother.”* His external manner was not the cause behind this assessment, although I do not doubt he was thoughtful and tender. Yet, *“we know no man after the flesh”* (2 Cor 5:16). One of the great curses of sectarianism (a work of the flesh, Gal 5:20, factions), is its promotion of a fleshly view of God’s people. Believers are assessed in regard to their denominational affiliation, with little or no estimation of their relationship to the Son of God. In view of Peter’s recognition of Paul, such an attitude is inexcusable.

Notice also the absence of competition among the Apostles. Peter was familiar with the writings of Paul, and apparently his readers were also. Yet, there was no competition between them. He is *“our beloved brother Paul.”* When the truth of God is loved and embraced, it removes any fear of the labors of other brethren. Here is a trait that is gloriously refreshing. It brings a liberty to the soul that is scarcely equaled in human relations.

### CONSISTENCY IN ALL OF HIS EPISTLES

*“ . . . as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things”* (NKJV). Too often, professed Christian teachers deal in novelties, and are known for it. But this was not the case with the Apostles, who were placed *“first”* in the church (1 Cor 12:28). They majored on the salvation of God, accentuating faith and hope. Here, Peter has brought up the coming of the Lord and the consequent end of all things. He acknowledges that Paul spoke of these same things in the necessity of readiness.

No congregational difficulty was allowed to overshadow the reality of Christ’s return, the end of the world, or watching and looking for our Lord’s blessed coming. The day in which God would *“judge the secrets of men”* was held before the churches. The *“night”* introduced by sin was declared to be *“far spent,”* and the day of the Lord *“at hand”* (Rom 2:16; 13:12). Saints were told of being *“blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ,”* and of the time when the Lord will *“come,”* making *“manifest the counsels of the heart”* (1 Cor 1:7-8; 4:5). Even the Lord’s table is taken with the Lord’s return in mind (1 Cor 11:26). The resurrection of the dead, to occur when Jesus comes, was held out as essential for life (1 Cor 15:23). Only then, when the Lord returns, will we be delivered from this *“vile body”* (Phil 3:20-21). It is then that we shall finally *“appear,”* becoming evident to the world that has rejected us (Col 3:4). Paul held out blamelessness at the appearing of Christ to be the aim of his

ministry (1 Thess 5:23). Then, faith will be culminated, as we are gathered to be with Christ forever (1 Thess 4:15-17). Then the wicked will be punished (2 Thess 1:7-10). We labor in anticipation of that day, longing for it, and preparing for it (1 Tim 6:14-15; 2 Tim 4:1-2; Tit 2:13; Heb 9:28).

You will not find, what is commonly called, "*the great commission*" in all of the epistles. Extensive teaching about congregation organization and church leadership are not found in every Apostolic writing. But the matters before us are expressed everywhere. The coming of the Lord, the end of the world, and our readiness for them! That is a common thread throughout the letters to the churches.

One wonders why so little of this is heard in our time. We hear a lot about evangelism, missions, worship, and praise—but little of the Lord's return, the end of the world, and preparation for them both. This indicates the purpose of God has been upstaged by an institutional emphasis—one that cannot possibly produce the results so sorely required. As morose and distasteful as it may appear, we are living in the very times of which Peter wrote. It is a time when Apostolic teaching has been overthrown in favor of the doctrines of men. Transitory purposes have displaced God's "*eternal purpose*," and this world has eclipsed the one to come. Paul's writings, together with those of Peter and others, have become largely irrelevant. In my judgment, the seriousness of this situation cannot be overemphasized.

### THE WRESTING OF SCRIPTURE

*" . . . in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures "* (NKJV). There is a spiritual formula provided for addressing texts difficult to understand. "*Give me understanding*" (Psa 119:34,73,125,144,169). Jesus provided this exalted perspective of understanding. "*If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself*" (John 7:17, NASB). *The driving compulsion that must precede true spiritual knowledge is that of desiring to do the will of God.* James also spoke of the proper approach to obtaining wisdom. "*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him*" (James 1:5). There is a wisdom that is "*from above*," and it is to be sought by all (James 3:17). When the prophet Daniel was confronted with something he did not understand, it is written that he "*sought for the meaning*," and it was given to him from heaven (Dan 8:15-19).

As rudimentary as this may appear, there is a class of religious people who refuse to approach understanding in this way. There **are** things "*hard to be understood*." They are **not impossible** to understand, but "*hard to understand*." They are too difficult for the flesh. They cannot be probed by academic methods. They extend high above the reach of the wisdom of men. They are too lofty for lexical word meanings, being of a higher order. People in Jesus' day were offended by some of His sayings (Matt 13:57; 15:12; Mark 10:22). On one occasion, the multitudes acknowledged what Jesus said was a "*hard saying*," and were offended by it (John 6:60). Such things frequently occur in our day, but men have developed convenient explanations for the condition that justify men and exalts their wisdom.

When men attempt to force God's Word into the mold of their stunted understanding, they have "*wrested*" the Scriptures. Rather than changing their way of thinking, they attempt to change the Word, manipulating it until it fits at last into their variant way of thinking. And what kind of men do this? Without hesitation the Spirit replies, "*ignorant and unstable people*" (NIV). They know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God (Matt 22:29), nor can they navigate in the mountain peaks of Divine truth. These are "*double minded*" people, which is the cause of the instability (James 1:8). Their minds have been infected with the virus of this world's wisdom, and their hearts are alienated from the life of God (Eph 4:18).

And what is the result of them tampering with Scripture? They do so "*to their own destruction*"—not the destruction of Scripture, but their own condemnation! Scholar or not, those who manipulate Scripture will be destroyed by God! As Peter said earlier, these are bringing "*upon themselves swift destruction*" (2 Pet 2:1). Of such men Paul wrote, "*whose end is destruction*" (Phil 3:19). Jude says of such people, they "*were designated for this condemnation*" (Jude 4). It is evident Christ's return, the end of the world, and our readiness for them are to be approached in faith and sobriety.

## LESSON #26

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

*“Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.”* (2 Pet 3:17-18, KJV).

### INTRODUCTION

In this book, Peter has fulfilled the mandate of His Lord, *“Feed My lambs . . . Feed my sheep”* (John 21:15-17). He has also done this in view of his imminent death, of which Jesus spoke at that very time (John 21:18-19). Not only was Peter preparing himself for his transition to the unseen world, he was preparing the *“lambs”* and *“sheep”* to do the same. He has dealt with essential issues—issues that have to do with our detachment from this world, and attachment to the one to come. Both the novice and the mature believer need to hear such things. Because we live in a war-zone, our *“pure minds”* must be *“stirred up”* by sound words and clear spiritual perspective. Peter has, indeed, proved to be the *“rock”* of which Jesus spoke. Even in a face of martyrdom, his mind turned toward Christ’s *“lambs”* and *“sheep!”*

### SEEING YOU KNOW THESE THINGS

*“You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand”* (NKJV). The *“things”* that are known *“beforehand”* include things confronted in the world now, and things to be confronted at the consummation of all things. Think of the remarkable panorama of Divine truth Peter has spread before us! He has reminded us that we *“obtained”* the same kind of faith as the Apostles, and that through the righteousness of God (1:1). With clarion trumpet, he reminded us that *“His Divine power”* has given us everything *“pertaining to life and godliness”* (1:3). *“For this very reason,”* we were reminded to add spiritual graces to our lives in the energy of the faith we obtained (1:5-8). The Gospel delivered to us is *“a more sure word of prophecy,”* having been confirmed by the resurrection of Christ and His present enthronement at the right hand of God (1:16-21).

With heavy heart, the aged Apostle warned us of a Satanic initiative. False prophets would enter in among the people, bringing *“damnable heresies”* that would, if embraced, thrust one into outer darkness. Such teachers would *“allure”* disciples by the lusts of the flesh, appealing to man’s fallen nature, rather than the new creation (2:1-3).

Lest men suppose themselves to be so strong they will resist these encroachments in their own power, Peter reminds us of the past. A vast number of angels once fell, as well as the Sodom and Gomorrah, cities of the plain (2:4-11). The wrath of God is something with which the wicked must contend. The angels that sinned were banished from heaven, and Sodom and Gomorrah were not allowed to continue in the world!

As if these things were not incentive enough, Peter reminds us of the temporality of the present heavens and earth. They are *“reserved for fire”* (2 Pet 3:7-12). **Everything that has had a genesis, will have a conclusion!** That is why, in salvation, we become *“partakers of the Divine nature”* – in order that we may survive the end of all things (2 Pet 1:4).

These are all things we have been given to know *“beforehand.”* We do not have to wait until they are experienced to know them! We can know false prophets coming, and arm ourselves by faith to overcome them. We can know the end of all things is coming, and prepare ourselves to make the transition to the *“new heavens and new earth wherein dwells righteousness”* (2 Pet 3:13). We can know Divine provisions exist, and appropriate them now.

Knowing these things *“beforehand”* assumes their priority to us. These are the matters that dominate our thoughts and communication. Those who *“know these things”* do not allow them to get far away. They keep them close by meditating upon them, and speaking of them. We are in a realm filled with antagonistic and hostile personalities, both seen and unseen. The condition demands alertness and vigilance, lest the things of God become obscure to us. **We must not assume friendliness from the foe, or hostility from our God!** Our lives are to be conducted in view of the temporal nature of this world, and the eternity of the one to come. The consideration of such things will have a sanctifying effect upon our minds.

### BEWARE LEST YOU ALSO FALL

*“. . . beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked”* (NKJV). Here is a most grave warning. Peter knew nothing of spiritual safety without personal diligence. Those who have concocted such doctrines have done a great disservice to the people of God! Some, unable to deny the truth of this word, have viewed *“steadfastness”* as an unessential spiritual quality. Such consistency, they imagine, is really not necessary. Only a loss of reward will occur for those who *“fall”* from their *“own steadfastness.”* Such teaching

is comfortable enough for the flesh, but grieves the Spirit of God. Its origin is the **“bottomless pit,”** and not the Holy Spirit of God.

The word **“beware”** means *keep under watch, carefully guard, and preserve from theft*. A contemporary expression would be **“LOOK OUT!”** It assumes the presence of hostile and aggressive spiritual forces.

When the Holy Spirit says **“BEWARE!”**, He has sounded a warning that must be heeded. Paul counseled, **“beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision”** (Phil 3:2). As Peter, he was speaking of corrupt religious influences. **“Dogs”** were teachers that ravished, rather than edified. **“Evil workers”** were people who allowed flesh to express itself, rather than crucify it. The **“concision”** were those who relied on circumcision for salvation, advancing a legalistic and mutilated approach to God.

Again, we are admonished, **“Beware lest any man spoil [captivate and rob] you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ”** (Col 2:8). All of these approaches are designed to cause believers to **“fall”** from *their “own steadfastness”* – to become spiritually inconsistent and unfruitful.

Notice, it is the **“error of the wicked”** that causes the fall from steadfastness. The point is that through **“the error of the wicked”** the devil seeks to divert us from the goal—to diminish our involvement with God through faith. There is a powerful drawing power to **“error,”** just as there is to the truth of God. **“Error”** tugs at the flesh, while truth draws the spirit of man. If a person chooses to live **“in the flesh,”** with temporal matters dominating the heart and mind, he is occupying the realm of **“error.”** There is no spiritual light in that realm—no Divine guidance, no empowerment!

Falling from steadfastness can only occur by *diversion*—by giving heed to what God has consigned to temporalness. Too, the things of God cannot remain in our grasp by fits and starts. We cannot push them into the background and yet gain eternal advantage from them. At the point we are not fighting the good fight of faith, we have **“fallen.”** *There is no such thing as salvation without the personal and consistent involvement of the one being saved.* Steadfastness is that involvement—it is what occurs when we live by faith, not grieving or quenching the Spirit.

Remember, every thing required for steadfastness is supplied in Christ Jesus, and through faith. There is no reason why every believer cannot remain steadfast, cleaving unto the Lord with purpose of heart.

### **GROW IN THE GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE**

**“ . . . but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen”** (NKJV). This is the only acceptable alternative to falling from steadfastness! It is apparent that **“steadfastness”** is not remaining in a fixed position, or holding our ground. **“Standing”** is our posture from the perspective of warfare (Eph 6:11). Growth views life as advancing toward the goal. It is progress in being **“conformed to the image”** of God’s Son—our appointed destiny (Rom 8:29).

Growth, in this case, is advance in the purpose of God. It is increased participation in the Divine nature. It includes **“root downward”** and **“fruit upward”** (2 Kgs 19:30; Isa 37:31). Spiritual stability is increased, and productivity becomes abundant. It should be of great concern to us that so little of either quality is found in the contemporary church!

There is a realm in which such growth takes place. You might be tempted to view this verse as advancing in grace and knowledge—i.e., both of them increasing in you. It is true that this takes place in growth, but that is not the point of this expression. The grace of God and the knowledge of Christ are the **environment** in which growth takes place. Peter is **NOT** saying, *become more gracious, and come to a point where you know more about Jesus*. Those are noble objectives, and not to be despised—in fact, they are essential.

This admonition is similar to Christ’s words, **“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me”** (John 15:4). There is a domain precisely suited for spiritual advance. From the objective, or principle, perspective it is **GRACE!** From the subjective, or experiential, view it is **KNOWING CHRIST**. **“Grace”** has to do with Divine influence brought to bear upon you. **“The knowledge of our Lord and Savior”** accentuates the result of that grace. Continuing in grace results in God revealing more to us.

We **“grow in grace”** when we increase in favor with God, becoming more precious to Him, and more loved by Him. Jesus set the pattern for us when He walked among men (Lk 2:52). Speaking of spiritual life, Paul wrote, **“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men”** (Rom 14:17-18). Faith is the unique possession that causes this to occur.

The knowledge of Christ is another way of saying we are being conformed to His likeness. It is the experience for which Paul **“suffered the loss of all things”** (Phil 3:8-10). It is Divine intimacy and participation in the Kingdom of God. Spiritual growth takes place in this soil! We are not to allow Satan’s ministers to lure us away from this Divine provision.

**“To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.”** Our growth in grace and the knowledge of Christ will bring glory to God **“NOW.”** This is the burning quest of every discerning soul—i.e., that *God will receive glory through them!* It will require intense and consistent effort on our part, to be sure. But God has underwritten all such effort, which

will not be in vain.