

Our Position and Our Purpose

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"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." [2 Corinthians 7:1](#).

KINDLING with strong emotion, constrained by the love of Christ and animated by the fellowship of all spiritual blessing, the Apostle here strikes out an exhortation in which he appeals to the noblest passions of the children of God—to their sense of a Divine lineage and a present endowment—as well as of an exalted destiny for an incentive to purity of character and holiness of life.

I. The first thought which he gives to stir up in us this godly ambition is that THE CHRISTIAN IS POSSESSED OF MOST GLORIOUS PRIVILEGES.

By such words—"Having therefore these promises," I understand not merely having the promises in reversion, as they belonged to the Jews, but having them in possession, having received them, having obtained them, having gotten them, having grasped them and being seized of them, as lawyers express it, so that the promises are no longer mere promises, but things which we have actually in our possession! I understand, by Paul's language here, that Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have a thousand blessed promises in the enjoyment of which they daily live.

The promises he especially refers to are mentioned in the previous Chapter. They appear to be these—first, Divine indwelling—"I will dwell in them." Now, this is no light or inferior privilege of the Christian Church. God has been pleased to make the bodies of His people to be the temples of the Holy Spirit. At this very moment, in every one of you who have put your trust in the Lord Jesus, Deity resides! He dwells not in houses made with hands, that is to say, of man's building, but yet He dwells within these houses of clay, tabernacling in us—this is a promise which we have actually obtained and are now positively enjoying.

The next is Divine communion—"I will dwell in them and walk in them." As God talked with Abraham, so He does with every Believer. God is not to us afar off, but He is our near and dear Friend, our close acquaintance—

"With Him high converse I maintain; Bold as He is I dare to be."

If I can tell Him my heart, He will also tell me His heart, for, "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." Communion is not merely a matter of promise to you and me, Beloved, but we enjoy it now! I hope it has become habitual with us to abide with Jesus Christ. At morning break, we can frequently say, "When I awake, I am still with You." And when the sun has gone down and we toss upon the bed, and cannot sleep, in the night

watches our soul talks with Him whose eyes never slumber. Blessed is His name, this walking of Christ with His people is one of the daily privileges of the heir of Heaven!

Another promise we have obtained is that of Divine covenanting—"and I will be their God and they shall be My people." God gives Himself to His people to be theirs, and they, by the purchase of His own Son, and by the effectual conquest of the arm of His Grace, are His. He has chosen us for His inheritance and granted to us that He should become our portion and our inheritance. "I will be their God and they shall be My people." Yes, God has entered into Covenant relations with us, bound Himself by promise and yet further by another immutable thing in which it is impossible for Him to lie, namely, by His oath. There are between us and our God bonds which cannot be snapped, links that can never be severed. Let us thank God, tonight, and summon every faculty of our souls to praise His name. This is one of the blessings which was communicated to some of the past saints, though they did not perfectly understand and comprehend it.

Cannot you and I basking in sunlight—light compared with which theirs was but twilight—say that we have obtained this promise?

In addition to all this, we have Divine adoption—"I will be a Father unto you and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." Is not this our blessed state? He loves us with a father's love, guides us with a father's care, protects us with a father's watchfulness, instructs us with a father's wisdom, bears with us with a father's patience, longs for us with a father's longing! We are His tender children and He is our loving Parent. These are not things which are yet to come, like the Second Advent of our Lord in millennia splendor—they are promises which we have obtained! These are things common to the worshippers at that altar of which we have a right to eat, and familiar at that table where we daily feed.

How unspeakably great is the dignity of a Christian if we look at it in the light of these blessings! Before we understood it, how we thirsted after it! We thought, when under conviction of sin, could we dare hope to be among God's people? It would be enough joy for us if we never had an earthly joy beside! I am afraid that since their blessings have become ours, we have not prized them as we should. Perhaps for this cause we are sometimes brought into the prison of doubt and our faith fails us. Just as we do not know the value of health till we are sick, so some of these blessed privileges are not valued by us until we have to walk in the dark and sigh and cry after unbroken fellowship amidst intermittent snatches of sweet assurance! The Lord give His people to know the value of these heavenly realities that in an abiding sense of their calling and their standing, they may act in a way that is worthy of such great dignities!

Now you perceive that it is necessary for us to get a good clear view of the possessions of the Christian because it is from then Paul draws his argument—"Having therefore these promises." He uses not the logic of the Law, nor the logic of threats, but the logic of love—"we

have these mercies; we are so unspeakably favored; we are living in the daily enjoyment of Divine indwelling, Divine communion, Divine covenanting and Divine adoption." Therefore he takes a step in advance and says, "let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit." It is clear, then, that the Doctrines of Grace, fragrant as they are of the privileges of the Christian, do not logically and spontaneously lead to licentiousness as some have profanely said, but they naturally and instinctively, lawfully and reasonably, lead to holiness of life! The fact that we are absolutely and unconditionally saved by God's Grace, that our standing is secure and that we have become the children of God, is not an incentive to careless walking and to unholy living! Such an argument is the weak invention of malice—unworthy, I had almost said, of the Father of Lies—for Satan is known to palm off his offspring with a plausible appearance. But the argument is to gratitude in the heart and obedience in the life. What is obedience to God but holiness? True obedience would be holiness in perfection!

II. We now proceed to an appropriate inference. THE CHRISTIAN, BEING POSSESSED OF GLORIOUS PRIVILEGES, IS THEREFORE LABORING TO BE RID OF OBNOXIOUS EVILS.

"Let us cleanse ourselves," says the Apostle. What then? Do they need cleansing? Are they such originally and by nature that they must be cleansed? God's blood-bought, quickened people—and yet need cleansing? Ah, yes, Brothers and Sisters, every one of them, even the Apostle Paul, himself! Where will you find a warmer spirit, a more zealous heart, a more consecrated man than the Apostle Paul? And yet he says, "Let us cleanse ourselves." It surely would not be presumptuous on my part, if there should be in this assembly some venerable saint who has been for many years kept in the faith with unblemished garments and engaged above many in the service of the Master in winning souls—it would not be presumptuous if I should say to him—"Let us cleanse ourselves." I suppose that the nearer we get to Heaven, the more conscious we shall be of our imperfections. The more Light of God we get, the more we discover our own darkness. That which is scarcely accounted sin by some men, will be a grievous defilement to a tender conscience. It is not that we are greater sinners as we grow older, but that we have a finer sensibility of sin and see that to be sin which we winked at in the days of our ignorance. Yes, we may say to those whose gray hairs show that they are getting near Home, "Let us cleanse ourselves." And if it is thus to the holiest and most eminent of the people of God, much more is it to us, Beloved—common saints, scarcely worthy to be called saints at all—only that we trust we are washed in the precious blood and are saved through the righteousness of Jesus Christ! "Let us cleanse ourselves."

How pointedly the Apostle puts it! I want you to notice the points. The work is personal—"Let us cleanse ourselves." It were more in accordance with our tastes to cleanse other people and attempt a moral reformation among our neighbors. Oh, it is easy to find other men's faults and to bring the whole force of our mind against them! It is delightful

to expose vice and lampoon the follies of the age with a dash of wit to enliven it, or to preach virtue with a little of the sugar of scandal to sweeten a painful tale! It highly gratifies some people when they can find a fault in some highly-respected Brother—they pull him to pieces with about the same zest that might be displayed by a crow or an ape. That is their forte, the strength of their genius—detraction—pulling to pieces what they could not put together and attempting to raise themselves by lowering others! But notice the Apostle says, "Let us cleanse ourselves." Oh, that we would all look at home! Oh, that we did more indoor work in this department! Yes, it is certainly our business to tell our Brother of his faults—this ought we to have done, but certainly we ought not to have left the other undone, for that is our first business! "Let us cleanse ourselves." It is all very well to drag the Church of God up to the altar, like some bleeding victim, and there to stab her with the sharpest knife of our criticism, and to say of the modern Church that she is not this, and she is not that. One might rather ask, "How far do I help to make her what she is? If she is degenerate, how far is that degeneracy consequent upon my having fallen from the high standing which I ought to have occupied?" We shall all have contributed our quota to the reform of the Church when we are, ourselves, reformed. There can be no better way of promoting general holiness than by increasing in personal holiness. "Let us cleanse ourselves."

There is activity needed, however, in discharging this personal duty. "Let us cleanse ourselves." It seems to imply that the Christian, while he is acted upon by Divine influence and is cleansed by the Holy Spirit, is also an active agent of his own sanctification. He is not like the vessels and the pots of which the Apostle speaks that were cleansed under the Law—but man is a free agent and the holiness which God works in him is not the pretended holiness of candlesticks and altars, but it is the holiness of a responsible being—a holiness which is not forced upon him, but which his whole soul gives consent to! He purges himself. Depend upon it, you and I do not grow holy by going to sleep. People are not made to grow in Grace as plants grow, of which it is said, "They grow you know not how." The Christian is developed by actively seeking growth, by earnestly striving after holiness and resolutely endeavoring to obtain it.

The utmost of our activity ought to be put forth in cleansing ourselves. Your bad temper—you will not overcome that by saying, "Well, you know I am quick-tempered. I cannot help it." But you must help it! You must if you are a Christian. You have no more right to shake hands with a bad temper than you have to fraternize with the devil! You have got to overcome it and, in the name of God, you must! Or if you happens to be of a slothful disposition, you must not say, "Ah, well, you know I am naturally so." Yes, what you are naturally we know—you are naturally as bad as you can be! But surely that is not the point we are concerned with—what you are to become by Divine Grace. Albeit sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit, yet it is equally true and this we must always bear in mind, that the Holy Spirit makes us active agents in our own sanctification! In the first work of regeneration,

doubtless the soul is passive because it is dead—and the dead cannot contribute to their own quickening—but being quickened, He "works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure." He does not work in us to sleep and to slumber—His good pleasure is answered by us when we are constrained to will and to do! Hence the Apostle's argument, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that works it in you. He works it in—you work it out. You have to bring out in the outward life what He works in the inner springs of your spiritual being. You are to work it out because He works it in." Sin is to be driven out of us as the Canaanites were driven out of Canaan by the edge of the sword. Jericho's walls will come down, but not without being compassed about seven days. Weary may be your march, but march you must if you would conquer! How does the Apostle put it? "We wrestle not against flesh and blood," and so on, but he represented the conquest as being a conquest gained by wrestling. He declares that he had to fight with his old nature and the conflict was stern. Although saved by Grace, gracious souls make marvelous efforts—efforts beyond their natural powers—to enter into a state of rest from sin.

Nor must we stop short of universality in our purgations and cleansing—"Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness." Your eyes must not spare, your heart must not pity one pet sin. Most man would gladly be holy if it were not for some onesin that they vainly flatter themselves to be harmless. "From all filthiness let us cleanse ourselves." O Christian, you may very well doubt your right to that name unless all sin is obnoxious to you! You have no right to say, "I will give up pride and vanity," if you excuse yourself for being covetous. If covetousness is the leak in your vessel, it will sink it quite as surely as pride! If neither pride nor covetousness should be there, yet if you have an unforgiving temper and cannot be heartily reconciled to those who offend you, you shall just as soon prove yourself to be reprobate that way by any other! It must be an interesting sight to be the father of a Jewish family purging out the leaven before the Passover. He lights a candle, you know, and goes to the cupboard under the stairs, or wherever the bread may be kept, and takes care that every bit is put away. He then has every cupboard unlocked and rummages with a brush in his hand—himself personally—and with a candle, too, to see lest there should be even a crumb of leaven—for he cannot keep the Passover if there is a crumb of leaven in the house! Such should be our earnest searching after all filthiness to get it all out! But search as best we may, I am afraid something will still be left. There will be some beloved idol hidden away somewhere in the recesses of the mind. The heart will cling to its idols in such a style that we cannot find them all with one investigation! There is always the need to search again and again—they must be searched after—and we must, each one, be prepared to say—

"The dearest idol I have known, Whate'er that idol may be, Help me to tear it from Your Throne, And worship only Thee."

The Apostle shows the thoroughness of this work by saying, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.." "Filthiness of to flesh." We may reckon this to in-

clude all the outside sins so well known and so easily distinguishable—those degrading sins which even morality condemns. Possibly, Christian, although you may guard yourself against these, yet you will be in danger from the next class, namely, sins of the spirit. These are the mothers of the sins of the flesh! Someone killed a wasp in the early spring and it was said that he had killed a thousand wasps, for that wasp was full of eggs. Sins of the spirit are full of that spawn which, when matured, issues in shameful delinquencies. If you can cleanse yourself from these, you will save yourself from dangers you little reckon—the outward life will be right enough when the inward life is right. I wish we were more concerned about cleansing ourselves from the filthiness of the spirit. I am inclined to think that some men heedlessly pollute their spirits—I mean that they do it willfully. I am not sure that when there is a divorce case in the papers, I have any business to read it—yet a great many very good Christian people who often pray to be delivered from temptation, take pretty good care that they master all its details! When there is a bad story afloat about anybody, I do not know that I should listen to it, yet that curiosity of ours often tempts the devil to tempt us! If there is any ditch-water, or any dirty puddle of water, I do not know that I am bound to get a drink out of it. True, I may be an officer appointed to taste the water, but if I am not, I would rather avoid the noxious sip—it were better to leave it alone. We may all do a great deal of that kind of thing and, nowadays, when the press ventilates everything and it is published all over the world, I am sure that Christians pollute their spirits a great deal more than they have any occasion to do! And besides that, we can turn over a sin in our mind, you know, till we become so accustomed to it that we do not think it to be a sin. I know that some Christians have managed at last to trick their conscience into the idea that what they do is not sin in them, but would be sin in other people—that they are so constituted that they require to be tolerated in this point, and to take a little liberty in the other point so that, generally speaking, although it would be very, very wrong for other people to do the same—they have got a sort of spiritual indulgence such as used to be issued by Rome, and they never doubt that they can sin with impunity! Ah, dear Friends, this will not do! "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit."

The drift of the argument is this—if God dwells in us, let us make the house clean for so pure a God. What? Indwelling Deity and unclean lusts? Indwelling Godhead and yet a spirit defiled with evil thoughts? God forbid! Let us cry aloud unto the Most High that in this thing we may be cleansed and that the temple may be fit for the habitation of the Master. What? Does God walk in us, and hold communion with us, and shall we let Belial come in? What concord can we have with Christ? Shall we give ourselves up to be the servants of Mammon when God has become our Friend, our Companion? It must not be! Divine indwelling and Divine communion both require from us personal holiness. Has the Lord entered into a Covenant with us that we shall be His people? Than does not this involve a call upon us to live like His people, as becomes godliness? Favored and privileged above

other men to be a peculiar people. Separated unto God's own Self—shall there be nothing peculiar about our lives? Shall we not be zealous for good works?

Divinely adopted into the family of the Most High and made heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, what need is there of further argument to constrain us to holiness? You see the, "therefore." It means just this—because we have attained to such choice and special privileges, "therefore"—for this reason, "let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit."

III. The text goes on to DESCRIBE THE CHRISTIAN AS AIMING AT A MOST EXALTED POSITION—

"Perfecting holiness."

There was a bitter discussion, at one time, about the possibility of perfection in the flesh. It was a most unhappy thing that this controversy arose at all. Between Mr. Wesley and Mr. Toplady fierce altercations were carried on. Between Mr. Wesley and Mr. Whitefield I believe the dispute was conducted in a temper honorable to both sides. One admires the Christian love of the two Brothers, who both of them stood to advocate what they believed to be the Truth of God and did maintain, I believe, their own views of Truth in a very proper spirit. But, as the dispute was carried on between Mr. Wesley and Mr. Toplady, I do not think it was creditable to the Christianity of either—they both of them seemed to have lost their temper and to have forgotten that "the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God." Hence this Doctrine of Christian Perfection never seems to me to have had fair consideration at all. It has been made an arena for controversy then rather a subject for deliberate thought.

"Can a Christian be perfect in this life?" When this question was put to me, the other night, I answered, "No." "Well, but is not the Christian perfect when he gets to Heaven?" "Yes." "Well, then, he was perfect when he died, was he not?" I thought he must be—I do not understand any change taking place in the solemn article of death—between the moment of departure from this world and the moment of entrance into Heaven. "Very well!" was the answer, "but he was in the flesh, then, you know." The question thus turned on being in the flesh—and the answer is obvious. The flesh is inherently sinful and all its carnal desires are at enmity against God. Perfection at present does not aim at regenerating the old nature—such perfection will be effected at the resurrection of the just. But as many as are perfect must control and keep the flesh and its motions completely under dominion. That is our present duty. If the death of the body looses us from sin, the mortification of our members which are upon the earth must be our continual aim till we are delivered from the bondage of corruption. An illustration may explain my meaning. I can imagine a room in your house being perfectly clean, but I cannot imagine it being kept perfectly clean unless the process by which it was first cleansed is frequently repeated. Whether that room is in constant use, or whether it is shut up after a monastic fashion, it will require to be swept and dusted every day or it will not be perfectly clean very long.

I remember hearing a man say that he had lived for six years without having sinned in either thought, or word, or deed. I apprehend that he committed a sin, then, if he never had done so before, in uttering such a proud, boastful speech! It seemed to me that if he had known anything about his own heart, he would not have dared to speak thus! Were it true of me, I think I would be like a man who had diamonds about him and dared not tell anybody, for fear the mention of it should prompt someone to rob him of his treasure! I would keep it all to myself. If such a priceless pearl as perfection can belong to any of the saints—and I were the happy possessor—I would be very jealous of it, lest anyone should know it and seek to deprive me of it! No, no—I cannot believe that the flesh can be perfect, nor, consequently, that a man can be perfect in this flesh! I cannot believe that we shall ever live to see people walking up and down in this world without sin. But I can believe that it is our duty to be perfect, that this Law of God means perfection and that the Law as it is in Christ—for there it is, you know—is binding on the Christian! It is not, as in the hands of Moses, armed with power to justify or to condemn him, for he is not under the Law, but under Grace. But it is binding upon him as it is in the hands of Christ! The Law, as it is in the hands of Christ, is just as glorious, just as perfect, just as complete as when it was in the hands of Moses. Christ did not come to destroy the Law, or to cast it down, but to establish it! And therefore, notwithstanding every point where I fall short of perfection as a creature, I am complete in Christ Jesus. That which God requires of me is that I should be perfect.

That I can understand. And the next thing I should know is that for such perfection I ought to pray. I should not like to pray for anything short of that. I should not like, at the Prayer Meeting, to hear any of you say, "Lord, bring us halfway toward perfection." No, no, no! Our prayer must be, "Lord, put away all my sin—deliver me from it altogether." And God would not teach you to pray for what He did not mean to give. Your perfection is God's design, for He has chosen you to be conformed to the image of His Son—and what is that? Surely the image of His Son is perfection! There were no faults in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to be made like He and as this is the work and design of Grace, then perfection is the center of the target at which God's Grace is always aiming. All that He works in us is with this great ultimate end and aim—that He may sanctify us wholly—spirit, soul and body, and that He may release us from sin and

make us perfect even as our Father who is in Heaven is perfect. Oh, when will it be? When will it be? Why, the very thought of it makes me feel as if I could sing—

"Oh, happy hour, oh, blest abode,
I shall be near and like my God."

What a joy it will be to be just like He—to have no more corruption of the flesh and no more temptations to sin to destroy the soul's delight and pleasure in her God! May the Lord hasten on the day! "Perfecting holiness."

Although a young artist, when he starts in his work, dares not hope that he shall come up to Praxiteles in sculpture, or to Apelles in painting, yet were he to set before himself anything short of the highest standard, he would not be likely to attain honor as an academician. When he begins to work, he studies not imperfect pictures, but the most perfect models he can find. He studies Raphael. He wants to see what Michael Angelo could do. "Oh," says one, "what are you trying to paint? Are you trying to be a Raphael? Will you ever paint like Raphael or Michael Angelo? Never." What do your sneers and jibes mean? Would you have him go and buy some worthless printing at a pawnshop and copy that? What sort of an artist would he make, then? The only possibility of his being a good artist is his taking perfect models. So with you, Christian, your model has to be the perfect Savior—and this is to be what you are to aim at every day, "perfecting holiness." And for all you may say, "Ah, I shall never come up to that. Many failures have proved to me that I shall not reach it." Yet you will do better with that as your ambition than you could have done if you had selected some imperfect model and had said, "Well, if I am as good as that man, that will suit me." Nothing but perfection must content you! Beloved, press forward towards it and God speed you in the race!

IV. Follow me one step further and observe how THE CHRISTIAN IS PROMPTED BY THE MOST SACRED OF MOTIVES—"Perfecting holiness in the fear of God"

An abiding sense of God's Presence, a perpetual feeling of our obligations to our Creator produces a reverent fear of God—not the slavish, servile fear which brings torment—but the fear which bows the tall archangel in adoration before the Throne of God, the fear which makes the cherub veil his face with his wings while he adores the Lord. Such a constant fear as this is the mainspring of Christian holiness! Not the fear of man, though many people are kept moral by that. Not the fear of some Christian whom you respect, lest he should upbraid you—that fear may be very helpful, in some cases, to keep men from certain sins, but it is a fitter motive for an infant than for a man! No, your great motive is to be the fear of God. Not the fear of the public eye. This is a very marvelous thing. Have you not often noticed that the very thing which the world calls, "bad, shameful, horrible, detestable," if it does not succeed—would be thought clever, creditable, to be admired if it succeeded? I believe that there have been scores of venturesome traders who have acquired wealth and gained a reputation for brilliant shrewdness by the very means which we see so much and so properly reprobated in certain other large traders nowadays—the only difference being that one man was fortunate enough to jump over the ditch, while the other man jumped in—but both were equally reckless! The world only appreciates success—that is the measure of the world's morality. The true Christian has a higher system of ethics. He perfects holiness in the fear of God—and if he should be successful, and the world should say, "Well done! Well done!"—yet, if he felt he had done a wrong thing or an unholy thing, his conscience would prick him. He would be as uneasy as though everybody pointed the finger of scorn at him!

I think he would be as restless as Zacchaeus was until he had made a just disposition of his unholy gains.

I cannot speak to you as I would wish tonight. But ah, were the hour of my departure come, were I allowed but to utter one sentence and then must die, I would say to you members of this Church, "Be holy!" Whatever you are, seek to be holy. And if you will not be holy—if you have a mind to keep your sins—do us the favor to lay down your profession! If you will have your sins and go to Hell, you can do it so much better outside the Church than you can inside. I cannot see why you need do Christ the double ill-turn to be His enemy, and yet profess to be His friend. Get out of the Church, you that are hypocrites! What profit can you get? There are no loaves and fishes that I know of to be had here. If you want them, there are some places where you can have them in abundance. There is no particular honor that I know of in being associated with this Church—we are generally held in little enough esteem by the world. Why should you come unless you intend to be true followers of the Crucified? Why, why, Deacon, if you love the world, do you pretend to love the Church? Judas, Judas, go sell somebody else! What need do you have to sell Christ and to be a son of perdition? O you who are unholy, you who cheat in business, you who can lie in your daily lives—there is scope enough for you outside of God's Church—why do you need to come with your filthiness where you are not asked to come, nor wanted? The Word

of God calls His saints to come out and be separate from such, but when once they thrust themselves into the Church, what shall we say? We feel like the servants who would gladly root up the tares, but that we must not do. They must both grow together until the harvest! Yet we would not sleep, but be watchful to prevent the enemy sowing more tares among the wheat. Be holy, be holy, be holy! You that are servants, be holy in the family! You that are masters, show holiness among your employees. Mothers and fathers, let your children see your piety! Children, may the Holy Spirit make you to be the holiest of children like the holy Child Jesus! And may it be a point with one and all of us that if we live, we will live unto Christ, so that when we die, we may be found in Him, made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light!

The Lord bless you, dear Friends, for Jesus sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: 2 PETER 1:1-8.

Verse 1. Simon Peter, a servant and an Apostle of Jesus Christ Peter was pleased to be able to write those words. There was a time when he had thrice denied his Master, but now he is glad to call himself, "a servant of Jesus Christ." Once he had said, "I know not the Man," but now he claims that he has been sent out by that glorious Lord to be His Apostle—a sent one—"a servant and an Apostle of Jesus Christ." Probably he had ringing in his ears at that moment, those blessed words, "Feed My sheep. Feed My lambs." And he was going to do that work again in this, his second general Epistle.

1. To them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ These Epistles are not written to everybody. Some readers do not seem to remember this fact. This one is written, says the Apostle, "to them that have obtained like precious faith with us." The faith of the weakest Believer in Jesus is the same kind of faith as that which was found in Simon Peter—who stands among the very first of the worthies in the College of Apostles. "Like precious faith with us." Only think of it, you whose faith is of a very trembling sort, which might be well described as, "little faith." Yet yours is "like precious faith" with that of Peter and the rest of the Apostles. The tiniest diamond is as truly a diamond as the Koh-I-Noor, and the smallest faith, if it is really the work of the Spirit of God, is "like precious faith" with that of the Apostles.

2. Grace and peace be multiplied unto you—You have some measure of these choice blessings—may you have a great many times as much! When we go to the multiplication table, we not only multiply by two and by three, but we can multiply by a hundred—we can multiply by ten thousand. Oh, that God would thus multiply to us the Grace and the peace that He has already given us! "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you—

2. Through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord. The more we know of God, the more grounds and reasons shall we have for enjoying Grace and peace. And the more we know of God and of Jesus, our Lord, the more will our enjoyment of Grace and peace be multiplied.

3. According as His Divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that has called us to Glory and virtue. It is through knowing God that we realize that "His Divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness," for all these things are in Him—and as we know Him, trust Him, love Him and become like He—we also come to possess all these precious things in Him.

4. Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the Divine Nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust [See Sermon #551, Volume 10—faith and life.] See what is God's great objective in giving us these "exceeding

great and precious promises." It is that we may become morally and spiritually like Himself—just and true and holy and righteous, even as God Himself is. O Brothers and Sisters, we fall far short of the high example that we find set before us in our gracious God! Nevertheless, we press forward towards the goal, strengthened by God Himself, who, having begun to make us like Himself, will never cease that blessed work until He has fully accomplished it.

5. And beside this, giving all diligence For we cannot expect to go to Heaven asleep. We are not taken there against our wills. It is not our will that accomplishes our salvation, but still, it is not accomplished without our will. "Giving diligence," yes, but more than that, "giving alldiligence"—

5, 6. Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance. It is ignorance that is intemperate and rash.

6-8. And to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things are in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. What Christian ever wishes to be barren or unfruitful? Is it not the aspiration of every branch in the true vine to bring forth much fruit?