

GERALD FLURRY

The Epistles of Peter

ALIVING
HOPE

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HOPE**

BY GERALD FLURRY

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The Apostle Peter was crucified around A.D. 67-68—some two or three years before the A.D. 70 holocaust in Jerusalem. That disaster was only a *type* of the coming Great Tribulation, about to explode on the world scene today.

Peter knew that he was going to be crucified shortly after his epistles were written. Paul had been killed about a year or two before Peter's death. Other apostles had also been killed. There was a storm of persecution. As Peter wrote his book they were entering into the darkest of times. Still, it was only a *type* of the worst time of suffering ever on Earth, which is descending upon us today.

In spite of all this bad news, Peter had a *message filled with hope*. He wanted God's people to be in an attitude of hope so they could continue to grow spiritually. The last verse of Peter's epistles (2 Peter 3:18) emphasized that crucial issue. We have no future if we aren't growing spiritually.

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Chapter 1

“A Living Hope”

PETER WAILED VIOLENTLY AFTER HE BETRAYED CHRIST, ACCORDING to one translation. He was in the depths of hopelessness.

He had told Christ that he would never forsake Him. Christ's response was that Peter would betray Him three times before the rooster crowed. When the soldiers came to take Christ, Peter followed at a safe distance. Then Peter warmed himself in a courtyard and people recognized him. They accused him of being a disciple of Christ. He denied it, even cursing them. After he denied Christ the third time, the rooster crowed. At that point, Peter remembered Christ's words and *wept bitterly!* (Luke 22:54-62).

Never was Peter more hopeless.

When this happened, Peter and the disciples had God's Holy Spirit *with* them, but not *in* them. They would receive God's Spirit *in* them on the day of Pentecost. It was at that point that the disciples became converted.

Before the day of Pentecost, Christ said to Peter, “[W]hen thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (verse 32). (This is Christ's plea to the ministry in any era.) Peter followed Christ's instructions as few men ever have. During Peter's life, none of Christ's disciples strengthened the brethren more than he did!

HOW PASSIONATELY CHRIST WANTS HIS MINISTERS TO STRENGTHEN THE BRETHREN! Do we ministers have this kind of love for the brethren? Do we see how desperately they need to be strengthened? Do we ministers understand how much we can help them build their hope? Do we have the love to do it?

PETER WAS ABOUT TO BE MARTYRED WHEN HE WROTE HIS EPISTLES. Then he was the epitome of hope. What a turnaround! Few—if any—of Christ's disciples have ever had more hope.

His message is needed more today than at any time in the history of man!

Peter's betrayal brought terrible shame on him! Think you will ever make it without God's Holy Spirit in you? Look at Peter!

There is an important lesson here. No matter how hopeless you may think it is, wait on Christ and He will turn it around!

God's hope never dies—it's always there for us if we want it. But we must be patient to find that hope.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS HOPELESSNESS WITH GOD. IN THE DEPTHS OF PETER'S DESPAIR, HE FOUND "A LIVING HOPE"! And so can you.

TWO-FOLD COMMISSION

God's Church has a two-fold commission: the great commission to the world, and the secondary commission of feeding the flock—the Church. (One of our major responsibilities is to *strengthen the brethren.*)

That first commission is quite difficult today. We face the worst crisis in world history. Our task is to warn the world about the greatest disaster ever to afflict this Earth.

In the short run, this world has no future. It faces nuclear annihilation and a host of other deadly evils. The problems are so severe that men can't face them. They ignore them and escape them any way they can—because they cannot *solve* them. Reality is bleak, and humankind has never been more hopeless. And it is becoming more hopeless, extremely fast.

For God's people to be unified behind fulfilling our commission—even in the shadow of mountainous difficulties—**MUST BE FILLED WITH HOPE!**

How can we have hope in the midst of such towering crises? And yet—**HOW CAN WE FULFILL OUR COMMISSION IF WE DON'T HAVE HOPE?**

You will never work diligently for God if you are not filled with joyful anticipation of the glorious future that awaits God's Family.

If our mind is just on the things of this world, we will become mired in depression, stress and discouragement. But

that is not how God thinks. If we were perfect, we wouldn't have those negative emotions—but, of course, we aren't. We struggle with doubts. Like Jonah, in our weaker moments, we can even want to run from our responsibility to God!

But the Apostle Peter provides something we **MUST UNDERSTAND** if we are to fulfill our commission. He gives us the solution to those problems.

The two epistles of Peter focus expressly on the greatest crisis man has ever faced. Yet at the same time, no book in the Bible concentrates more on *hope*.

Peter spoke of a *living hope*—a hope that is **ALIVE** in our minds!

Hope abounds in our commission—it is *filled* with hope! It contains a mind-expanding vision.

The world's problems are real. **BUT THIS HOPE IS MORE REAL!** This hope fills us with joyful anticipation and expectation. We anticipate and expect the most hope-filled future that our minds can imagine.

If we lose focus on our commission, our hope will vanish. We *must* have hope in order to function in a hopeless world! If ever there was a time when we needed this hope, it is now.

TRYING TIMES

“And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. ... Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (Revelation 12:9, 12).

Satan is far more wrathful today than when Herbert W. Armstrong was alive, because his time is so short. (Mr. Armstrong died in 1986.) This age is worse—more dangerous. The devil is working on the *moods*, *attitudes* and *feelings* of mankind as never before. The world is becoming increasingly unpredictable.

God's Church is going to face unusual problems. Knowing that Satan has been cast down and is feverishly laboring to attack us, we can be sure of that fact. He looks for every oppor-

tunity to attack. Since we are his number-one target, we must prepare ourselves.

ALL OF GOD'S PEOPLE MUST UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE ENTERING EXTREMELY TRYING TIMES.

What we have faced to this point is minor compared to what we are about to experience.

But God always prepares us for such circumstances. *This is where Peter comes in.*

HOPE IN THE MIDST OF TRIAL

Perhaps we think of the Apostle Peter as being bombastic—all personality. That is far from accurate.

Notice what *Lange's Commentary* says about Peter's first epistle: "No portion of the New Testament is so thoroughly interwoven with quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. It contains, in 105 verses, 23 quotations—while the epistle to the Ephesians has only seven, and that to the Galatians only 13."

Peter knew the Bible—probably more than any of the other apostles. He was much more than just personality. A major reason why he excelled was because of his understanding of Scripture. His writings are filled with Old Testament quotes. Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Peter had strong faith—based on a deep knowledge of the Bible.

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15).

Peter set them a marvelous example in always being ready to answer questions about our hope. He knew the Old Testament extremely well and quoted it frequently.

He set an example of hope, and his profound Bible understanding stirs and inspires us today.

Why was Peter chosen as chief apostle? One of the major reasons was that he knew the Bible! Are you known as a person who really knows his or her Bible? Christ said we would be held accountable for every word.

THE BIBLE IS JESUS CHRIST IN PRINT. What a mind-jarring blessing this book is for God's very elect. We must KNOW THE

MIND OF GOD and be deeply grounded in the Bible in order to have the hope we need.

AS HE WROTE, PETER KNEW HIS OWN DEATH WAS IMMINENT—CHRIST HAD TOLD HIM. Peter faced death and other serious problems, yet his writing contains the greatest hope of any book in the Bible! Peter faced situations far worse than any we have faced. How could you *know* you were about to die and not be anxious about that? How can you have deep hope in the midst of fiery trials? Peter shows us how.

God’s chief apostle didn’t realize it at the time, but HE WAS PROPHESYING SPECIFICALLY FOR OUR TIME TODAY—the last hour—the time of Satan being cast down, of the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord.

So God inspired Peter to write about the ULTIMATE HOPE. The Holy Spirit led Peter to dig that hope out of the Bible.

We must follow Peter’s example and it will reward us with the most ecstatic hope man’s mind could ever imagine! As Paul said, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! . . .” (Romans 11:33).

When people call us for a visit from one of our ministers, they tend to have a lot of questions. When they first come to Church, they usually have many questions. That is when God expects His people to really *come alive!* That HOPE within us should come bursting out—we should be *ready* for those questions! What an honor to be able to explain and teach the deep truths we have been taught.

Before long, ALL of God’s people will be surrounded by millions of people wanting to learn what we know. We must let Christ prepare us for that awesome job.

God wants us to be ready now to answer sincere questions. And you must answer according to “the hope that is *in* you.” This hope can’t be faked. It must be *in* each one of us. We must live our daily lives with this hope in us.

Why is this so important? GOD IS PREPARING US TO TEACH BILLIONS OF PEOPLE ABOUT THIS HOPE IN THE WONDERFUL WORLD TOMORROW! Throughout the Millennium and the period represented by the Last Great Day, we will teach billions. All humanity will be filled with living hope.

Our hope today is a vision of mind-staggering magnitude. God is going to have a hope-filled Family of billions.

Today, we see only a tiny beginning. We must work hard and study hard to etch this vision in our minds now. Are you ready to give an answer for that HOPE WITHIN YOU?

Like Peter, we can face severe persecution—even death—and still be filled with hope. We must have this hope to face the worst crisis ever on planet Earth.

AS YOU WATCH TELEVISION, YOU NEED TO ASK YOURSELF: “IS THIS PREPARING ME FOR THE COMING PERSECUTION? IS MY HOPE STRONG ENOUGH TO ENDURE THE FUTURE?” We must use our time wisely. It takes time to build hope.

For almost 2,000 years, people have heard about and read the prophecy regarding “Armageddon.” Very soon, this world will actually witness it! We can see events building to that point. Some religious fanatics in the past may have thought they saw those events, but they didn’t. Today we do: *We are living in the time of Armageddon!* And we can powerfully prove it.

So we must look beyond the time of Armageddon to the extremely good news. That takes in-depth Bible study.

THE ACCELERATED TIME FRAME DEMANDS THAT WE BE MORE URGENT. Peter’s writings confirm that.

Every effect has a cause. THERE IS A CAUSE FOR HOPE AND JOY, AND A CAUSE FOR DEPRESSION AND DISCOURAGEMENT.

You will not find hope outside the source in which Peter found it. We must search deeply into God’s Word—because within it there is BOUNDLESS HOPE!

LIVING HOPE

Peter thought everything he was warning about would come to pass shortly after he died, which gave his writing an urgency and intensity. The crisis on the horizon at that time was the holocaust of A.D. 70. That was a terrifying chamber of horrors filled with atrocities like human cannibalism—so awful it drove people mad!

Peter didn’t realize that those horrors were only a *type* of the holocaust that is about to occur today!

Peter’s first epistle begins, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1). The “strangers” he is speaking to are the scattered saints of God, whom God con-

siders “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13). The Revised Standard Version translates this, “To the exiles of the Dispersion.” God’s people were scattered all over—many of them were exiled for doing God’s Work! They lived in exceedingly difficult times.

We are not called into a plush life with no problems.

The word *scattered* is from the Greek *diasporos*, which literally means “scattering of seed.”

In the first century God allowed His Church to be scattered around the world to spread the gospel. They had no television or printing.

This “scattering of seed” produced *growth* in God’s people all around the known world.

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father . . .” (1 Peter 1:2)—or “chosen and *destined by God the Father*,” as the RSV says. Chosen and destined by God the Father means chosen and destined to be His SON! That is our DESTINY!

The Father is building His Family.

Verse 2 continues, “through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ . . .” This is the same message contained within the first verse of Jude: God set us apart and worked with us *long before* bringing us into His Church. (Our booklet on Jude, which explains this process in detail, is available free upon request.)

Each one of us must be selected by the Father (John 6:44). But how does God know who to make a part of His elect?

The word *foreknowledge* is from the Greek *prognosis*, which also became an English word. *Webster’s Dictionary* defines *prognosis* as “to know before . . . forecast—something that foretells.”

That means that THE FATHER HAD TO KNOW US SO WELL THAT HE COULD FORECAST OUR CHANCES TO BECOME A BORN SON OF GOD—BEFORE SELECTING US!

God had to know us profoundly to make such a forecast. Then He decided whether or not to select us. If the prognosis was good, we became part of His elect. If not, these people were not to be selected in this age of man ruling over man.

THERE NEVER IS A SELECTED PERSON WITHOUT THIS IN-DEPTH FOREKNOWLEDGE OF THE FATHER. Never!

There were undoubtedly many, about whom God gathered “foreknowledge,” who were not chosen to be God’s elect. But

all of those who were chosen have an excellent chance to be born into God's eternal Family!

Then we become the Bride of Christ to help Him rule the world and the universe.

If any of these firstfruits fail, they have only themselves to blame.

We are begotten by the Father—not Christ. A few people leave the Philadelphia Church full of wrath. Sometimes they will then work to destroy our Church. They are outside of God's Family, and they know it. This causes them to become enraged. Satan then recruits them to do his dirty work.

After this short introduction, Peter hits his primary theme: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a LIVELY HOPE [“a LIVING HOPE”—RSV] by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (verse 3).

Commentaries miss the whole point here. *Where do we get this living hope?* Please carefully ponder this truth. The Father *begets* us into a living hope. So where is the hope? THE LIVING HOPE IS IN THE BEGETTAL! Christ is the Father's Son. Now we too are begotten as God's sons. If we are loyal to God, we will be born into God's Family at Christ's return.

This is so awesome that the world can't get it!

IMAGINE THIS METAMORPHOSIS FROM A HUMAN TO GOD. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we are born as sons into the Father's Family!

Instantly, we become Gods of the universe—sons of God. This majestic goal makes anything physical seem trivial! Do we really fathom our mind-stretching potential? Only here do we find *the living hope!*

There is hope no place else.

Imagine: Peter knew he was about to die. But he still had a LIVING HOPE—A HOPE THAT LIVES!

This is what we need in this end time: A HOPE THAT LIVES. Certainly God's people need it—but the WHOLE WORLD needs it as well.

Though people may not realize it, they have *no hope* outside our Father's begettal, which leads to our being born into His Family. People in this world are living in the most hopeless times ever. God wants us to be giving the world LIVING HOPE.

In order to do that, this hope must first LIVE IN US! If it is going to be in God’s Church, it must start with *God’s ministry*. If it is to be in this world, it must start with *God’s Church*.

Our ministers must ask themselves some searching questions: *Am I living and teaching this hope? Am I really showing God’s people what they need to see?*

Though Peter discussed the worst problems ever on Earth, he set a marvelous example of wrapping his life and everything he did in the hope of God.

Even when facing personal difficulties, we can be people of phenomenal hope.

In our commission to “prophesy again” (Revelation 10:11), WE NEED THIS LIVING HOPE. IT MUST RADIATE FROM OUR TELEVISION PROGRAM—IT MUST SATURATE OUR PUBLICATIONS. We must keep refining our articles to ensure that they are saturated with hope. People must see that we are not just doomsayers trying to scare them into living the way we do! We must show them *living hope*—how they can solve and conquer their problems.

WE WILL NEVER FINISH OUR COMMISSION WITHOUT THAT LIVING HOPE.

Why is God revealing more from Peter now? Because this is the most hopeless time in man’s history!

We were called to give the world hope. To do so we must be filled with the exhilarating hope of God!

God’s people are training to *regenerate* ALL OF MANKIND! Our commission is intended for the LARGEST AUDIENCE POSSIBLE: We are to “prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings” (Revelation 10:11). That means we must convey God’s hope to them! Our commission is NOT a negative commission. Yes, we warn—but if people heed the warning, what hope they have! We can give them *solutions* to the evils they suffer.

Herbert W. Armstrong often said that “if your heart is not in God’s Work, you’ll fall by the wayside.” Why is that? Because God’s commission is a vision of hope. Lose that hope, and the Work becomes too hard to do.

Revelation 10 is about the mystery of God, which is filled with hope. Our book *Mystery of the Ages* makes that abundantly real. But the same chapter is also about *the little book*, or *Malachi’s Message*. This book tells us how 95 percent of God’s people fell away from proclaiming *Mystery of the Ages*. They

lost our transcendent vision of hope and turned back to the vomit of this world. So God had to raise up another Work to *prophesy again*.

Our commission is filled with hope. It keeps us looking to a fabulous future of endless hope.

Peter was with Christ when many of His disciples turned away. But Peter didn't. Why? "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:66-69). Peter gave no thought to leaving. There was no place to go. Rebellion meant a dead end forever—eternal death. These are WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE—I repeat, WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE! There is hope no place else. And the hope in eternal life is far too awesome to ever turn away. We must not let that happen!

Some 95 percent of God's people are headed into a black and dangerous future—a hopeless future. Their only hope now is repenting and coming back to Christ.

Sub-Saharan Africa is home to 11 million children orphaned by AIDS. Those poor children did nothing to deserve that—they are born into a black nightmare without hope! No one on Earth can provide even a *hint* of a solution to a problem of such magnitude—EXCEPT GOD'S PEOPLE! There is a solution! When people look toward the message of God, they end up recognizing within it a wonderful hope!

All of the problems of this world would be eliminated if the people heeded our message.

Where else is there any hope for Africa? Or for the United States, or Australia, or Britain, or South America, or the Philippines? There is none. It can ONLY be found in God's true Church.

Spiritually, the greatest crisis on this Earth is that MOST of God's people have turned away from that hope! They are no longer honoring their Father (Malachi 1:6). But HONORING THE FATHER is at the *heart and core* of real hope! Why? Because God the Father is going to bring ALL PEOPLE INTO HIS FAMILY! That is why humankind was CREATED! EVERYONE who repents and turns to his or her Father will have that transcendent opportunity!

MOST OF HUMANITY DOESN'T HAVE AN INKLING ABOUT THIS MIND-SPLITTING, WONDERFUL FUTURE.

If we love this hopeless humanity, as Christ did, we should be willing to die for them. And if we are filled with God's living hope and love, we will want desperately to convey this hope to them.

How could we see the hopelessness in this world and not feverishly desire to help them? Getting this hopeful message out is the only way to express our love and hope. IF YOU REALLY LOVE THE PEOPLE IN THIS WORLD, YOU WILL LOVE SUPPORTING THIS MESSAGE!

THE LAST TIME

Here is our future: “To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4). Our hope is in that inheritance—it's for “you”! Put your name there. Colossians 1:5 talks about “the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.” No matter the trials we face on Earth, nothing can damage our hope—because it is laid up in heaven, where God the Father and Christ reside. If we look to them, our hope never dies. Nothing can steal it—THOUGH WE DO HAVE TO GUARD IT.

No trial or tribulation can quench our hope, if we guard it.

“Who are kept [or guarded] by the power of God through faith . . .” (1 Peter 1:5). “Kept” would better read *guarded*, which is a military expression. Our hope must be guarded with a military spirit—eternal life and eternal death are at stake. Satan, who is totally hopeless, is a master at destroying people's hope.

Have the Laodiceans lost their living hope? Peter says that if you understand that hope, you will GUARD IT WITH YOUR LIFE—you won't let anyone steal it from you. That is the theme of his epistles. Study them to see how to BUILD that hope and GUARD it!

Verse 5 concludes, “. . . unto salvation ready to be revealed *in the last time*.” Here Peter talks about “the last time.”

Lange's Commentary says about this phrase, “Peter thought immediately impending was that last time,” which is actually the time in which we now live. The *International Critical Commentary* says, “The exact phrase is not elsewhere found. It means not ‘time,’ but ‘THE TIME’—the appointed time or season for some par-

ticular thing, whether it be a period or a moment”—or an HOUR, or LESS THAN AN HOUR. That is what Peter means.

Thayer's Lexicon says of this phrase, “Extreme, last in time or in place, talking about the last time. THE TRUMPET AFTER WHICH NO OTHER WILL SOUND. Of the time nearest the return of Christ from heaven. In phrases of the time immediately preceding Christ's return from heaven and the consummation of the divine kingdom, the uttermost part.”

Peter's mind was on the END TIME—the same time John and Jude spoke of when they talked about antichrists and false prophets inside God's Laodicean Church. The VERY LAST LITTLE HOUR OF TIME ON EARTH after God's true Church has turned away from Him! The critical time in which God reveals these epistles.

The *International Critical Commentary* also gives one definition for “in the last time” (verse 5) as “in a season of extremity” or “the direst peril.”

This expression—“in the last time”—actually has a double meaning. First, it refers to the most extreme and deadly danger man has ever faced, just before Christ's return. It is the worst time of suffering ever on this Earth (Matthew 24:21-22; Daniel 12:1). Second, the *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* adds another meaning to “in the last time.” The word *time* is from the Greek word *kairos* (2540 in *Strong's Concordance*): “season, time, but not merely as a succession of moments which is *chronos* (5550). *Kairos* implies that which time gives an opportunity to do. . . . [Or] opportune time, opportunity.”

THIS LAST HOUR PRESENTS US WITH AN UNPARALLELED OPPORTUNITY TO INTRODUCE CHRIST TO THE WORLD, AS IT FACES A NUCLEAR NIGHTMARE.

Never has so much happened so fast. And we have been given an open door to tell the world what is happening and how it will end.

THE YEARNING OF ANGELS

“Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ”

(1 Peter 1:6-7). In the midst of severe trial, remember that it is only “for a season,” or “for a little while” as the rsv says, and that there is a tremendous payoff!

We have an opportunity to gain a fabulous reward for serving God *in the last time*. GOD IS OFFERING THE PHILADELPHIANS AN OPPORTUNITY TO RULE WITH HIM IN HIS HEADQUARTERS FOREVER. Only about 5 percent of God’s people today will receive such a noble honor! The Laodiceans will lose that reward.

In this last hour before Christ returns, it will be a trial for all of God’s people. It is a time when the world faces nuclear annihilation and many of God’s own people become antichrists and fight against the very elect! We are persecuted both by the world and God’s own Laodicean Church. But don’t forget our magnificent hope: It leads directly into “the appearing of Jesus Christ”!

So let’s make certain that our faith “might be found unto praise and honour and glory” when that time comes very soon. We *must* grow in faith.

“Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy [Spirit] sent down from heaven; *which things the angels desire to look into*” (verse 12).

The angels far exceed us in power and brilliance today. They possess a dazzling fiery radiance—to see one in its glory would probably make us faint! Yet Peter tells us that those great beings YEARN to look into the process *we are going through*—in which GOD IS RECREATING HIMSELF! They yearn to know what He plans for mankind. They yearn to better understand what God is doing with YOU!

HUMAN BEINGS BECOMING GOD—THAT IS TRULY STAGGERING!

The word *desire* is present tense. THE ANGELS ARE *STILL* FERVENTLY IMPASSIONED TO LEARN MORE DEEPLY ABOUT GOD RECREATING HIMSELF IN MANKIND AS THE PLAN UNFOLDS.

This is God’s ultimate master plan.

If the angels, who will never be gods, have this intense interest, shouldn’t the depth of our passion at least match theirs? We are going to be Gods—sons of God!

The word translated *look* implies that the angels are bending over, stretching and straining, trying to figure out what God is doing.

And yet, *most of God's people today are not even interested in this mystery because they are SO BLIND!*

Imagine the angels watching this process transpiring and saying, *What is God doing? How magnificent! He is recreating Himself!* They are simply staggered and inspired by the greatness of God and His plan!

SET YOUR HOPE

“Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, SET YOUR HOPE fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (verse 13, RSV). Set your hope! Get it locked in; set it in concrete. Never forget what magnificent plans God has for you.

God clearly shows us how to build that hope. “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation [conduct]” (verse 15). The God who called you is holy. That means He wants you to be holy as He is holy!

God's sons must think and act like their holy Father. What a regal and majestic standard!

WHAT CAPACITY WE HAVE TO GROW!

“Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings” (1 Peter 2:1). We must get rid of malice, deceit and hypocrisy—talking one way and acting another. Are we guilty of evil-speakings or backbiting, slandering, putting other people down?

“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (verse 2). Newborn babes hunger and thirst for their mother's milk. That is how we must desire and yearn for God's truth and character. That is how we grow and mature. We need spiritual growth to face the future and make it into God's Kingdom.

“To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious” (verse 4). We come to Christ—the living Stone. He was rejected by men, but always remained a Rock. He was always precious to His Father.

“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (verse 5). 1 PETER IS VERY CHURCH-ORIENTED, BUT PETER NEVER USES THE WORD CHURCH. Why? We

can use the word *church* so often, and without thinking, that it loses its true meaning. I believe Peter used words that would have greater impact on people who were struggling spiritually or who were falling away. He was doing all he could to stir them. *He called them “lively stones” or followers of the Rock, Jesus Christ—not a church.*

We are *living stones* who are becoming like the Rock.

We have to be “built” into a spiritual house—again he didn’t use the word church. He wanted them to vividly see that we must be *building* with the Holy Spirit.

Our religion can’t be built on emotions—the Rock must live in us! Christ must rule the spiritual house. The God Family lives in that house—that means we must be united.

We are “an holy priesthood”—not just a church. We are a temple of kings and priests (Revelation 1:6) to serve God. We offer spiritual sacrifices to the world and each other. It all emanates from the Father and Christ.

“Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded” (1 Peter 2:6). If we truly believe this Cornerstone (Christ), we will never be confounded or ashamed.

We live in a house of faith. We follow the Master of that house. It brings only honor—never shame.

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (verse 9). WE’RE A FATHER-CHOSEN PEOPLE—NOT JUST A CHURCH. WE’RE A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION—NOT JUST A CHURCH. WE ARE SPIRITUAL ISRAEL, A NATION OF PRIESTS GETTING READY TO TEACH AND RULE THE WORLD—NOT JUST A CHURCH.

A spectacular, new nation—unseen by the world—is about to burst on the scene. We’re getting ready to help Christ rule the nation you live in.

We’re not just a church!

Why are we here? To “shew forth the praises of him” who called us. We have been *called out of darkness into His marvelous light.* Now we must declare the Father and Son Family light to this dark world. We must be bursting with energy to show the praises of our loving God.

We grow spiritually by declaring the omnipotent God to this hopeless world.

In the time past, we were not a people. Now we are the people of God—lively stones, helping our Father and Christ give spiritual life to a lifeless world (verse 10).

“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (verse 11). We are strangers and sojourners just passing through. The elect. Not of this world. Our citizenship is in heaven. We are pilgrims on the way to the promised land.

We’re not just a church. We’re *the brotherhood* (verse 17), *sheep* (verse 25), *the flock* of God (1 Peter 5:2), we’re the sons of Abraham and the daughters of Sarah (1 Peter 3:6).

How God honors His nation of priests!

Peter records a good example of what it means to “set your hope.” “So once the holy women who *hoped in God* used to adorn themselves and were submissive to their husbands” (1 Peter 3:5, RSV). These women set their hope in God. They trusted Him and believed in His family plan. They were so exemplary that God saw fit to record their example in His Word for all time.

WATCH YOUR PRAYER LIFE

Peter firmly believed he was living *in these last times* (1 Peter 1:20). But that time is now. Most of all, he wrote for us.

“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin” (1 Peter 4:1). Christ has suffered for us and now we must *arm* ourselves with the same mind.

Are you *armed* with the mind of Christ, who suffered mightily for each one of us? We must be *armed* with His mind to endure our fiery trials.

“But the end of all things is *at hand*: be ye therefore SOBER, and WATCH UNTO PRAYER” (verse 7).

Again Peter stresses the urgency of the times. The *Companion Bible* says the phrase *at hand* means it has DRAWN NEAR. *Thayer’s* says it is “concerning things IMMINENT and SOON

TO COME TO PASS.” Vincent’s *Word Studies* says it means, “literally, ‘has come near.’”

This *end* doesn’t mean the final death of man and all things. It is referring to the end of man’s rule and the beginning of a new age, ruled by Jesus Christ.

This worst crisis ever is about to give birth to a new and splendid age. There is intense pain, but what a birth!

Why did God allow the apostles to think Christ was coming in the first century? I’m sure it was to ensure that we all focus on Christ’s return! That is our hope! All human history points to that greatest of all events. God let those great men believe it was imminent in order to prod them to bear down and concentrate on Christ’s return.

Today, the end of all things *truly is AT HAND!* So we must take Peter’s point to heart: *BECAUSE TIME IS SO SHORT, WE MUST BE SOBER AND WATCH UNTO PRAYER.*

The fact that Christ’s return is so near should *change our behavior.*

Because Christ is almost here, we must be very concerned about our prayer life. *Carefully* watch your prayer life and keep your mind on the return of Jesus Christ. Get your prayer in. Make certain you are *TALKING TO GOD—GETTING THROUGH TO HIM—EVERY DAY.* Pray until you have living hope! *PRAY YOURSELF INTO THAT LIVING HOPE, DAY AFTER DAY!*

Sober means to be of a sound mind, having curbed one’s passions and exercised self-control. Is there a single one of us who couldn’t do a better job of curbing our passions and exercising self-control?

The RSV renders this verse, “The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers.” Keep yourself stable so that when you talk to God, you don’t *WASTE* your prayer life! We can do that! God wants us to be in good condition and focused in prayer, so we can get up from our prayers filled with hope!

Peter admonishes us to examine our lives to see where we can do more. *THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST’S IMMINENT RETURN SHOULD MAKE US URGENT SPIRITUALLY.*

Look at the time frame: *HAVE A SENSE OF CRISIS—and a sense of HOPE!*

We are facing the worst crisis ever—never has there been anything like it in mankind’s history. *Never* have men needed God’s warning more than now. And we only have a tiny time span to do this Work.

We need to watch world news and our prayer life. If we aren’t praying properly, we won’t see what is really happening and be urgent about it.

If we are going to become more urgent, we must get our minds on the end of all things—concluded by the return of Jesus Christ.

If we don’t have a sense of crisis, we are out of touch with reality.

The four horsemen of the apocalypse are galloping toward us. The build-up to Armageddon is racing toward its conclusion!

If we aren’t praying intensely *in the Spirit*, we will get our minds on *things* and off the trunk of the tree. That will cause us to fall into a panic—terror as the crisis intensifies. Putting things ahead of God is an ineffective escape to help us hide from Armageddon.

Peter shows us how to face man’s worst crisis with abundant hope. Study his book carefully.

We can’t do this job without the power of God. Peter endured trials not through physical strength, but by the power of God. Though we are naturally cowards, we must become great leaders for God. If we are empowered by the Holy Spirit, we will be far different than what we are humanly.

How do we endure trials? Peter says, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (verses 12-13).

Trials are meant to try us. When Christ’s glory shall be revealed, we could add that His glory will be revealed *IN YOU*, according to 2 Peter 1:19. Endure the trial—because when you see the result of it and the wonderful change that will come over you, you will be glad with *EXCEEDING JOY* that you learned the necessary lessons through that trial!

Remember, when God tries us, we are “partakers of Christ’s sufferings.” That is how we need to think of our fiery trials.

"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17). Are we aware every minute of every day that God is judging us now? EVERY MINUTE WE ARE UNDER GOD'S CAREFUL SCRUTINY.

This world is not being judged today. So we can't think like the world. God is preparing us to teach them in the near future, when all people will be judged.

FERVENT LOVE

"And above all things have fervent [love] among yourselves: for [love] shall cover the multitude of sins" (verse 8). There should be fervent love among the people of God, between husbands and wives, between ministers and members. God's Family should be *filled* with love. The love of God is the foundation of our hope.

"Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). God's ministers are not to "lord it over" God's people, but to be EXAMPLES OF HOPE. Lording it over someone causes them to *lose* hope! The government of God is a service-oriented government; that means serving and loving the brethren and being "helpers of [their] joy" (2 Corinthians 1:24). But it cannot become a permissive government.

"And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:4-8). Over 95 percent of God's people today have been devoured by the devil. Most of God's people are Laodicean or worse. What greater evidence do we need of Satan's devouring power?

"Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the

world” (verse 9). Are you having some rough trials? So are your “brethren” in the world. All of these people are potential sons of God, the same as you are.

God looks upon the world as our *brethren*—our future Family of God.

WE NEED CHRIST’S SACRIFICING LOVE FOR THIS WORLD (John 3:16).

Without this love, Satan will stir up hateful emotions in us, as he does in the world. Then we will be seriously distracted from this noble calling.

“By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand” (1 Peter 5:12). We are about to enter a black night of suffering. We stand by focusing on our hope-filled inheritance.

Herod Agrippa cast Peter into prison, from where he was miraculously delivered by an angel (Acts 12:1-11). Shortly after Herod died, Peter reappeared in Jerusalem to continue God’s Work. He relied on God’s power and hope to stand.

God’s ministers must make God’s living hope a part of everything they do. What value is it if it’s not part of our thinking, our counseling, our preaching, our teaching? God’s people must SEE HOPE in us! THE BEST WAY TO TEACH HOPE IS TO BE AN EXAMPLE OF HOPE.

How can you TEACH HOPE if you don’t HAVE HOPE?

Without God’s trials we would not dig out this *living hope*—the only one there is.

We need what Peter had. In his epistles, he shows how to get it and make it part of our lives. What God is offering is not phony—it is reality: the greatest, most exciting hope our minds could possibly grasp!

Chapter 2

A Vision of God's Majesty

IF YOU CAREFULLY STUDY THIS BOOKLET ABOUT PETER'S EPISTLES, YOU will see that God is giving us a more comprehensive overview than ever before.

Peter saw this overview. In his epistles he acquitted himself beautifully as God's chief apostle.

Peter's first epistle deals primarily with enemies outside the Church. His second epistle deals mainly with the more dangerous enemies *within the Church*.

But in order to introduce that very sobering topic, Peter expounds on the greatest hope in the Bible.

CALLED TO GOD'S GLORY

This second epistle begins, "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1). Notice what Peter said there: WE CAN POSSESS THE SAME TOWERING FAITH THAT PETER AND THE OTHER SPIRITUAL GIANTS OF THE BIBLE HAD!

In both epistles, Peter established that he was an *apostle* of Jesus Christ. Why? Because people inside and outside God's Church were questioning his office!

"Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord [the knowledge of the God Family], according as his divine power hath given

unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (verses 2-3). In the RSV, verse 3 says that God “CALLED US TO HIS OWN GLORY AND EXCELLENCE.”

Consider it! God never called the angels to “his own glory and excellence.” We are called to a glory that EXCEEDS that of the angels—called, in fact, to the very glory of the God described in Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 1!

That is hope beyond compare! God is RECREATING HIMSELF. How can we believe that truth and not be *filled with hope*?

The fiery angels yearn to understand about God recreating Himself. How much more should we who are being created in God’s image?

“Whereby are given unto us EXCEEDING GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES: that by these ye might be PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:4).

This verse demands that I comment on it.

Human beings have “desperately wicked” human nature (Jeremiah 17:9). The whole world worships the devil—has his nature (2 Corinthians 4:4). However, mankind was created with the potential to receive God’s nature—have the very nature of our Creator!

One definition of the word *nature* in that verse is “constitution.” You were created to have the divine constitution. That is another way of saying you will be God—members of God’s own Family—if you obey Him.

God is building His own nature only in the very elect today. They are preparing to be born into God’s own Family with *divine nature*!

The people of this world have been blinded to their own human potential. We have a potential the angels were never ever given.

God saw after Lucifer’s rebellion that only His nature could rule and beautify the universe, so He implemented the plan to recreate Himself in man.

No wonder the angels desire to look into what God is doing!

DO YOU YEARN TO LOOK INTO THESE THINGS AS THE ANGELS DO? Actually, we should yearn to look into these things even more, since we are the ones to be born into God’s Family!

Perhaps if we couldn't have it, we'd yearn more to look into it. But if God just hands it to us, are we not interested? We are dust—tabernacles that were created to die—yet God says, *I want to give you the divine nature! You're made after the God kind!* GOD IS RECREATING HIMSELF THROUGH DUST! (Genesis 1:26).

This is the hope we must have in order to fulfill our commission. We must be excited about what we are doing! When someone first comes into God's Church, often he or she is on fire with "first love"—extremely stirred up about God's truth. We who have been in the Church for some years should not be *less* excited than those individuals! We should progress from first love, to second love, to the third, fourth and so on! That love should be GROWING right up to the moment we are born into God's Family! We should be OVERFLOWING WITH EXCITEMENT to be a part of this awesome plan orchestrated by our heavenly Father.

Though Peter faced imminent death, the more he got into this subject, the deeper became his hope. FACING DEATH HELPED HIM IMMENSELY IN DIGGING OUT THIS LIVING HOPE!

God begets His people with His Holy Spirit. He implants within us His spiritual seed—a part of His very essence. As we use it, that Spirit grows and multiplies within us, and we take on more and more of the characteristics of our heavenly Father (2 Peter 1:5-7). "For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 8). With God's Spirit abounding *in us*, we are molded into the IMAGE OF GOD—the mind and character of God.

"But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins" (verse 9).

Peter was dealing with the same problem *inside the Church* that we grapple with today in the Laodiceans: people who are spiritually BLIND! (Revelation 3:17). They have forgotten that they were purged from their old sins, and they have gone back to them!

Throughout this second epistle, Peter discusses the serious problems he saw within God's Church, which was only a *type* of the Laodicean era today. So it has extraordinary significance for us. Peter both identifies the problems and provides solutions.

THE PRESENT TRUTH

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: FOR IF YE DO THESE THINGS, YE SHALL NEVER FALL: FOR SO AN ENTRANCE SHALL BE MINISTERED UNTO YOU ABUNDANTLY INTO THE EVERLASTING KINGDOM OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST” (2 Peter 1:10-11). This is a promise from God: Having received from Him our calling and election, we can secure our position in His Kingdom forever if we remain DILIGENT in “these things.”

Peter is telling us today how not to fall. And what an appropriate subject, since 95 percent of God’s people have fallen away from God in this end time. That should never have happened, but it shows that this is *dangerous knowledge*. We have the potential to be sons of God, but it’s so easy to “*neglect so great [a] salvation.*”

Peter shows us how to make our “calling and election sure.” He teaches us how to prevent the greatest catastrophe of all! Will we heed what he says? Do we really want to achieve our mind-splitting potential? It’s ours for the taking, but we must give diligence—that means giving the required diligence to be born into God’s Family, and nothing less.

“Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and *be established in the present truth*” (verse 12). In order to safeguard our calling and election, our studies should include two parts: REMEMBERING PAST TRUTH, and BECOMING ESTABLISHED IN PRESENT TRUTH.

The Philadelphia Church of God owns and publishes a bounty of material from Mr. Armstrong. Do we REMEMBER that past truth—past *revelation* from God? We continually instruct our ministers to teach it to the members.

God restored ALL THINGS in this end time through Mr. Armstrong. How much will He require of us because of that? He holds us accountable for EVERY SINGLE WORD!

God has also given His Church today *volumes* of present truth—new revelation from God. Are we ESTABLISHED in it? Do our ministers make certain that our members become established in it? That is our job.

What consequences will we suffer if we neglect to ground ourselves in both past and present truth? Just look at the Laodiceans who, at best, are spiritually STAGNANT, *receiving no nourishment from God*, in terms of NEW REVELATION—and at WORST, are SPIRITUALLY DEAD.

Verse 12 sets the Philadelphia Church of God (PCG) apart from the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) and all the other groups who come out of our mother church.

Only the Philadelphia Church today has “present truth,” or new revelation. HERE IS THE MAJOR TRUTH OF WHERE GOD IS AND WHERE HIS CHURCH IS!

NONE OF THE LAODICEAN CHURCHES OF GOD HAVE BEEN GIVEN ANY NEW REVELATION. NOT ONE.

That means that Jesus Christ is only speaking to the PCG today! God speaks to His very elect through new revelation.

A Laodicean member asked me a question recently. She asked, “How does your group differ from all the other groups?” (She meant the WCG and the other groups that came out of the WCG.)

I explained to her that it was the *new revelation* (or the “present truth”). CHRIST ALWAYS GIVES NEW REVELATION TO THE CHURCH DOING HIS WORK. The Work then must deliver that message—new revelation—through *the open door*, which Christ provides (Revelation 3:7-8).

The “present truth” implies that there is also past truth or past revelation that was given to God's true Church—in our case, the Church that was led by Herbert W. Armstrong. It also implies that you must cling to that revelation, no matter what the cost.

We fought in court for six years to win the right to print Mr. Armstrong's books, booklets and correspondence course. All of that *past* revelation was given to him.

God has given new revelation to me about all of the major and minor prophets, Lamentations, Daniel, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, the epistles of Peter and John, the books of Jude and Revelation and others—an abundance of *present truth*.

All of this revelation for the Church was given to me in this Laodicean era—just as all of the revelation was given to Mr. Armstrong in the Philadelphia era.

NOBODY ELSE HAS BEEN GIVEN ANY REVELATION IN THIS END TIME—NOBODY!

God “reveals his secrets to his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7)—especially in this worst crisis ever that is facing mankind. The individual must respond to God’s calling and seek out that prophet—prove who and where he is. (For more information, request our free booklet *Who Is “That Prophet”?*)

The Laodiceans should ask, “*Why don’t we have new revelation?*” Then they would clearly see where God’s true Church is *not*. Then they could easily see where the *only* Church is that is doing God’s Work of getting that past and *present truth* to the world.

God has *not* given the Laodiceans an open door, because they have rejected His revealed message—much of what Mr. Armstrong taught and all of the new revelation God has given the PCG in this Laodicean era.

“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Revelation 3:10). Because we have *kept* God’s word—all the revelation He gives—God is going to protect us from the coming nuclear holocaust (also see Revelation 12:14). And that is just the physical reward.

The Laodiceans will be plunged into the Great Tribulation.

God always gives new revelation to His loyal Church and He always has a Work to proclaim that revelation.

The very elect that hangs on to the past revelation is given the new revelation, or present truth.

NEW REVELATION SHOULD SHOW ALL OF THE LAODICEAN CHURCHES WHERE GOD AND HIS WORK ARE TODAY. Again, it is *the* major proof of where God is! Christ speaks through new revelation. Then He opens a door for His Work to deliver that revelation to the Laodiceans and the world. All of the revelation given should convict the world of where God was in the *past* and is in the *present*.

WHY PETER SUFFERED

Peter referred to his physical body as a “tabernacle” (2 Peter 1:14). That is all it is! It is temporary—we were created to die. Peter was ready to put his tabernacle off—because he was ready to PUT ON IMMORTALITY!

We all want to live—but we must put off this temporary body sooner or later.

God's plan was for Peter to be put to death. Why? There is more to it than just His desire to refine Peter's character.

With the crisis in the Church, his personal trials and the knowledge of his imminent death, Peter had so much he could have been negative about. But PETER WAS LEARNING A LESSON SPECIFICALLY SO HE COULD TEACH THE PHILADELPHIA CHURCH OF GOD IN THIS END TIME! We must learn it, so we can build this solid hope into our lives—and then proclaim it to the world!

What Peter went through was a stupendous blessing for us!

God has a plan to get this lesson into our minds as we go forth to broadcast a difficult message in the most difficult times ever! This is what will keep us going when we don't *want* to keep going.

This hope is for the whole world. We must be globally minded, as God is. Christ gave His life for the WORLD. We have been called to follow in His steps. We must not be bitter and hateful toward the world. God says we are to LOVE OUR ENEMIES. Mr. Armstrong said that even for the fiercest enemies of the Church, he never asked God to curse them—but ONLY TO BLESS THEM. (Of course, sometimes a blessing can look like a curse. God has His means of correcting people.) Can we love our enemies enough to die for them, as Christ did? If God hadn't opened our minds to understand the truth, we would be just like them!

What wouldn't we give to see the people of this world repent and *not* have to go through the tribulation coming upon it? Would you die for them, as Christ did? God loves even those who hate Him.

The way we can show our love to the world is by giving people the wonderful hope Peter talked about.

Revelation 10:11 shows that we have a warning for the whole world. But just a few verses later, in Revelation 11:15, we see the kingdoms of this world becoming the Kingdom of God! Yes, there is a warning—but a warning with awesome hope.

As we will see, 2 Peter 2 contains one of the strongest warnings in the Bible. But look at how Peter set it up: Verses 13 through 21 in chapter 1 provide a powerfully inspiring introduction! Peter knew he couldn't just rush in and tell them (and us)

how our loving God is going to correct His sons. First he gave the vision of hope. People need vision before they'll respond to correction.

It is our responsibility to give the Laodiceans and the world this vision of hope just before what is discussed in 2 Peter 2 is fulfilled.

PETER'S WARNING

Peter specifically speaks to those who were going blind spiritually, trying to stir them up: "Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by *putting you in remembrance*; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me" (2 Peter 1:13-14). You can sense Peter's urgency in trying to reach those whose spiritual lives were in jeopardy—and to get their minds on eternal glory!

Here Peter prophesies of his own imminent death. Here is Peter's farewell address—he knew he would die, and *not* of natural causes! Christ had told him about what would happen (John 21:18-19). *As Peter faced death, his main concern was what would happen to God's precious people when he was gone!*

He had only a short span of time to help them. We have precious little time to warn the Laodiceans.

Peter was trying to get them to *remember* what they had been taught by Christ and the apostles. They were forgetting. How urgently this applies to the Laodiceans today. They are forgetting, or have forgotten, what God taught them through Mr. Armstrong. There is no excuse for any of us to forget.

Peter knew that he would "shortly" put off his temporary "tabernacle"—or be killed. Tradition says that he insisted on being crucified *upside down*. He didn't consider himself worthy to be crucified as Christ was.

At a violent time like that, he wrote the epistles. The epistles of Peter are the best writings in the Bible on the subject of hope!

As we face the most terrifying times on Earth, we must have hope to grow and survive.

GOD HAS REVEALED THIS BOOK TO US TODAY SO WE CAN BE FILLED WITH HOPE, AS PETER WAS.

"Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able *after my decease* to have these things always in remembrance"

(2 Peter 1:15). Again Peter prophesies of his death. Peter wanted so much for the people to REMEMBER! Seeing how closely the book of Jude parallels 2 Peter 2, I'm sure Peter gave this instruction to Jude, and he *followed through*—after Peter's death—unlike the leadership in the WCG after Mr. Armstrong died. This admonition is just like the one Mr. Armstrong gave before he died: *Remember the liberalism that almost destroyed God's Church in the 1970s, and hang on to the truth—lest history repeat itself!*

The Philadelphia Church of God has followed Jude's example today. (Request our free booklet on Jude to see how it is tied to Peter's epistles.)

Peter continues, "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables [or fantasies], when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were *eye-witnesses of his majesty*" (verse 16). We must base our beliefs on the bedrock of God's truth, not on fables.

Here the apostle referred to the vision of Christ's Second Coming he received with James and John on the mountain during Christ's ministry. *I witnessed what it is going to be like*, Peter said. *I've told you all about that! Doesn't that move and stir you? Don't you get it? Are you blind to that?*

The chief apostle had quite a problem on his hands *within the Church of God*.

Let's review the vision he was talking about—and we will see that it too is tied right in with our Work today.

THE MOST PIVOTAL END-TIME PROPHECY

One day, Jesus Christ said this to His disciples: "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matthew 16:28). Six days later, He fulfilled this promise.

Jesus took Peter, James and John—perhaps the top disciples—to a high mountain. "And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him" (Matthew 17:2-3). In vision, Christ's face radiated like the sun and His garments glistened. *That is what we will look like very soon*. Our face will shine; our raiment will glow. God is about to give us HIS OWN GLORY AND EXCELLENCE!

“While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (verse 5). Notice: The Father is at the head of His entire Family, directing everything! THIS ONE VERSE SHOWS THE GOD FAMILY VISION.

When they heard that voice, the disciples were afraid and fell on their faces. Christ soothed them and told them not to fear. When they looked up, that wonderful vision was gone—but it had been SEARED in their minds and hearts. “And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead” (verse 9).

These disciples had seen a vision of the Second Coming. Now notice what is tied right in with it: “And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that *Elias* [*Elijah*] must first come? [that is, before Christ returns]. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things” (verses 10-11).

That vision given to Peter, John and James tied right in with the arrival of an Elijah in the end time, just before Christ returns! That vision was tied directly to a man named Herbert W. Armstrong! THIS IS A SIGN TO THE WORLD THAT JESUS CHRIST’S RETURN IS IMMINENT. When “all things” are restored, that is the beginning of the end!

Herbert W. Armstrong was that end-time Elijah. He played THE KEY ROLE in restoring God’s truth. He prepared the way for Christ’s Second Coming!

THE PHILADELPHIA CHURCH OF GOD PLAYS A CRITICAL PART IN THIS PROPHECY AS WELL, BECAUSE SINCE MR. ARMSTRONG’S DEATH WE HAVE HAD TO SUSTAIN THOSE RESTORED TRUTHS AND FIGHT TO KEEP THAT SIGN VISIBLE! The PCG has kept all those restored truths alive. We must ensure that the world *remembers* that sign, so it will know Christ is about to return. Christ’s return is getting closer all the time. After all, the end-time Elijah has come and gone!

THE PROPHECY OF ALL THINGS BEING RESTORED JUST BEFORE CHRIST’S RETURN IMPLIES THAT THOSE RESTORED TRUTHS WOULD REMAIN AS A SIGN FOR THE LAODICEANS AND THE WORLD! They may have been cast down, but God would quickly “raise up [the] ruins” (Amos 9:11) of His Work and proclaim those restored truths to the world again.

Even as we fought in court for Mr. Armstrong's writings, those truths were in the public eye. If the Worldwide Church of God had won in court, those restored truths would have been buried. I BELIEVE THIS IS ACTUALLY ANOTHER PROPHECY THAT WE WOULD WIN OUR COURT BATTLE!

This is, after all, THE SIGN Christ gives—so He made sure it would remain evident for people to see. Can you conceive of Christ—the Head of His Church, who gave those restored truths as an integral part of the vision of His Second Coming and a sign of His imminent return—actually allowing someone to DESTROY that sign for the world? If there is any faith on this Earth, if there is any work to be done, it is *inconceivable* He would allow that!

Christ did not leave it to chance. He personally ensured those restored truths survived!

Of course, He did make us fight for those truths to prove our love for Him.

We could *not* have fulfilled our commission to *prophecy again* (Revelation 10:11) without Mr. Armstrong's books and booklets concerning those 18 restored truths! Without them, Satan would have blocked the foundational part of our message to the world. God would never allow that—as long as there are any loyal people left to do the Work.

So we *prophecy again* for the last time before Christ's return! Again we take those 18 restored truths to the world after they were *cast down* by the Laodiceans (Daniel 8:11-12).

After Mr. Armstrong died, the PCG was put on center stage. We have to keep this major sign of Christ's Second Coming alive.

What an honor to prophecy again.

PETER WROTE ABOUT THIS VISION MAINLY FOR THE PCG. THAT IS WHY GOD IS REVEALING THE EPISTLES OF PETER TO US TODAY.

Peter, James and John received a *foretaste* of Christ's Second Coming. This made it possible for them to teach us about this vision with profound feeling and impact! We need this hope to endure to the end.

Can you see how Christ's first coming and Second Coming are connected and intertwined with the Philadelphia Church of God today?

THIS MATTHEW 17 PROPHECY IS THE SINGLE-MOST PIVOTAL PROPHECY IN THIS END TIME. It is THE MAJOR SIGN TO THE WORLD THAT

the Second Coming is almost here. (See Mark 9:1-12 for Mark's version.)

These 18 restored truths have not ceased to be a sign the world can see. Christ wants that sign visible. He sent an important personality at a critical juncture in history—a man to restore all things. *If you want to get ready for my Second Coming, Christ is saying, learn about those truths and go to where they are being taught and disseminated.*

If you act on that, you will have living hope!

Peter was there and saw that vision. He became a martyr for that hope.

AND CHRIST INSPIRED PETER TO EMPHASIZE THAT VISION FOR GOD'S PHILADELPHIA CHURCH TODAY. ALL PROPHECY IN THIS END TIME REVOLVES AROUND THAT AMAZING PROPHECY!

Look at the exalted position Christ assigned to Mr. Armstrong, tying that man directly in with the vision of His Second Coming. Yet 95 percent of God's people don't think he fulfilled that role. That is drop-dead spiritual blindness! All of the top leaders who worked with Mr. Armstrong rejected his office and some or all of the doctrines he taught. That is a mountain-sized blindness. If they saw clearly, they would CLING to that man's office and what he taught!

In this confusing world, things can seem complicated. Here Christ keeps it simple: If the world wants to find God's Work today, all it has to do is understand the end-time Elijah.

Learning about the Elijah gives you a foundation of HOPE! It is an undeniable sign that Christ is about to return to right every wrong and bring justice to this unjust world.

Find who has and is proclaiming those 18 restored truths and you will find God's very elect today! There you will find God's Work—His *revealed* message.

That is a major way to know where God is now!

The world must be introduced to its Creator. He is coming shortly to solve all of our hideous problems. There is no other solution.

A VISION OF HOPE

Why did Christ give these disciples that vision? TO GIVE THEM HOPE! Most of them were going to have to die for God. God knew

these men would face overwhelming troubles, which meant that, in order to endure them, they needed a GIGANTIC HOPE!

Can you imagine being given a vision of Christ's Second Coming so you would actually know what it will look like? Wouldn't that motivate you more? Surely it would strengthen your resolve. And if God decided that you would have to die in order to enter the Kingdom, it would be much easier to accept that fate.

Those apostles endured terrible times. But can you imagine hearing Peter or James or John preach about the breathtaking vision they saw with their own eyes? You would think people would have clamored to hear more about it—eager for every detail of what Jesus Christ and God showed them about the most important event ever to occur in the universe. That had to make for some dynamic messages! People were honored to be able to hear them.

These men had this vision etched in their memories. AND SO MUST WE, IF WE ARE TO BE FILLED WITH HOPE.

Having given these men this vision, God was able to use Peter and John in special ways—ways that are particularly meaningful for us in this era right before Christ's arrival. John's writings form the basis of our understanding of the God Family vision. John and Peter both spoke about antichrists and other problems the very elect are dealing with today; they spoke specifically about our court case.

Have no doubt: Christ is intimately aware of what we are doing. God the Father knows all about us.

The voice from the cloud said, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.* The same God tied Mr. Armstrong right in with that vision. Realize: He isn't just concerned about His Son—He has MANY, MANY MORE SONS about to enter His Family, and He talks in specific detail about them!

There is no gospel without the Father. He is the Head of the Kingdom, or Family.

What a marvelous truth! God the Father wants to say about all of us, *These are my beloved sons, in whom I am well pleased! They act like me—their Father!* Can you grasp what God is offering you?

Peter continues the thought in his epistle: "For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a

voice to him from the excellent glory, THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED. AND THIS VOICE WHICH CAME FROM HEAVEN WE HEARD, when we were with him in the holy mount” (2 Peter 1:17-18). Now, for someone who believes in God being a trinity, this may be confusing. But when you understand that God is a Family, and there was a FATHER who was happy to praise His BELOVED SON, you know exactly what Peter is talking about.

Peter was with the Son, saw a vision of His Second Coming, and then heard a voice from the Father. No wonder he could write so powerfully about our *living hope!*

The Father wants to draw us into His bosom to share that Family love! What a vision of hope!

THE DAY STAR

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (verse 19). *Your hearts*, Peter wrote. He is making this VERY PERSONAL.

What did he mean by saying “a more sure word of prophecy”? Remember, it is in the context of his reminiscing about that vision on the mountaintop.

When Peter saw that image of God’s Kingdom, he didn’t have God’s Holy Spirit *in* him. He is saying that when the Spirit of God comes into you and gives you revelation, then that is the MOST SURE, CERTAIN WORD OF PROPHECY THERE IS—HAVING GOD DIRECTLY INJECT IT INTO YOUR MIND VIA THE HOLY SPIRIT!

He says that we should “take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn”—which day? The sunrise of the wonderful World Tomorrow! That is what we live for. The Second Coming is the living hope Peter talked about.

But notice: It doesn’t end there, with Christ ruling the Earth. *Then comes something even more spectacular:* “AND THE DAY STAR ARISE IN YOUR HEARTS.”

Hearts refers to the center of our spiritual lives—and THIS IS THE CENTER: Revelation 22:16 calls Christ “the bright and morning star.” Revelation 2:28 says that God will give the over-comer “the morning star,” speaking of our becoming the Bride of Jesus Christ and shining as He does! This occurs *after* “the

day dawn." Christ will return, He will meet His saints in the air—and then THE DAY STAR WILL RISE IN OUR HEARTS! Christ in us will rise in our hearts, and in a sudden change we will be sons of God who look like Christ, and we will be THE BRIDE!

Thayer's Lexicon says this about verse 19: "I will give to him the morning star, that he may be irradiated with its splendor and *outshine all the others, like the morning star.*" That's right! God is going to give His firstfruits a measure of glory that He won't give the others. It will burn brighter and exceed the glory of everyone else who is added to the eternal firmament of God's Family.

That is the hope Peter talked about: the ETERNAL SUNRISE IN OUR HEARTS, OR OUR SPIRITUAL LIVES. This is why we are here: to become Christ's Bride. And THE VERY ELECT REMNANT WILL SHINE WITH GREATER GLORY THAN THE LAODICEANS WHO REPENT IN THE TRIBULATION. Paul discussed rewards of gold, silver and precious stones. He also said our reward could be burned ("wood, hay and stubble"), even though we are saved (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). *Paul explained how one star differs from another star in glory, as we will in the resurrection!* (1 Corinthians 15:40-42).

THE MORE OUR HEART IS IN THIS WORK, THE GREATER OUR SHINING GLORY IN THE RESURRECTION. You need to ponder these words carefully!

Peter was dealing with people of God who were turning their backs on this truth—the most obscene thing you can imagine. Yet the same thing has happened in this end time. This message is mainly for you and all saints in this last hour.

Most commentaries do not understand *the order* in this verse because they don't understand about MAN BECOMING GOD! We are not trying to rule this world today while it is shrouded in darkness. Christ will return—we will be changed—and *then*, when that day dawns, we will help Him rule the Earth! At that point, our face will be like Christ's—shining like the sun!

How much is this future reality a part of our day-to-day thinking? How profoundly do we grasp it?

The more I study, the more obvious it becomes how little the world knows. These universe-shaking truths are too God-level and wonderful for the carnal mind to comprehend!

This is where most of God's people have made their big mistake. You will never submit to God's government if you don't

comprehend this vision. You will never endure the trials God gives you unless you see this splendid reason to do so.

You can trace this truth right back to Genesis 1:26, where God's plan from the beginning was to make man *in His image and likeness*—that is, AFTER THE GOD KIND. We must not let the world's faithlessness rub off on us: We must HAVE FAITH IN GOD'S WORD! Read it and believe it! Christ said we are to live by EVERY WORD of the Bible.

Still, it takes the Spirit of God to believe. How can you envision becoming God if you have only the human spirit?

Colossians 1:27 reads, "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." What is that mystery? It is Christ in you. It is the morning star—which outshines all the others—rising in your heart, and you becoming the Bride of Christ.

Romans 10:4 tells us that the end of the law is Christ. If you keep that law, the end result is becoming like Christ. We are going to be like Christ and God! This is our hope of glory—the LIVING HOPE Peter described.

Peter, facing intense trial, was digging more deeply into the hope of God, trying to help the people see it. If you have this hope, you will NEVER FALL. We are getting close to the time when our faces will shine like the sun!

THIS TRUTH IS REALLY THE THEME OF PETER'S EPISTLES. "[T]AKE HEED, AS UNTO A LIGHT THAT SHINETH IN A DARK PLACE"—THAT IS, THE WORLD TODAY—"UNTIL THE DAY DAWN"—THE WORLD TOMORROW—"AND THE DAY STAR ARISE IN YOUR HEARTS"—WHEN YOU BECOME A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY OF GOD.

Let me emphasize this again to make sure we really get it.

Some of the commentaries say this order is reversed. That is because they don't understand God's master plan. First, we have a light that shines in this dark world when we are called and given God's Holy Spirit. Second, Christ returns and the day dawns—this evil world becomes the wonderful World Tomorrow ruled by Christ. Third (this is the part that seems out of order to many Bible scholars), "and the day star arise in your hearts." We are not changed into spirit beings until Christ returns. Remember the vision where Christ's face shone like the sun—so will ours! And our raiment will be white as light.

We will *shine like the stars and the brightness of the firmament* when Christ returns. We become sons of God.

Some commentaries even reverse the order, thinking it is wrong. That is because they don't understand that God is re-creating Himself (Genesis 1:26; Philippians 3:21; Psalm 17:15; Daniel 12:2-3; 1 John 3:1-2). They won't believe their own Bibles. They can't believe the hope of all hopes: that we are going to become Gods!

The world calls this blasphemy. (Our potential is so staggering that the human mind can't fathom it!) The very elect calls it the most transcendent truth in the Bible.

This is *the* gospel!

You and I must think deeply about this spiritual lightning of the mind. It is easy to let a truth of such magnitude slip away. But it is so out-of-this-world that we must *not* let that happen.

No trial will stop us if we retain this living hope of cosmic glory!

How can we become the Bride of Christ and not be God? How can we become sons of God and not be God? It is time that all humanity rip Satan's deceit from their minds.

THIS UNDERSTANDING IS AT THE HEART OF WHY PETER BECAME THE CHIEF APOSTLE. He felt honored to submit to God's government of hope. Because he comprehended government so well, God gave him authority over all the apostles.

He didn't feel worthy to be crucified the way Christ was. PETER KNEW HE WAS FACING SUCH A BRUTAL END. BUT JUST BEFORE IT HAPPENED, HE WROTE THE MOST HOPE-FILLED BOOK IN THE BIBLE! How do you explain that? Trials cause us to dig deeper spiritually. First of all, God revealed this sublime hope to him. Still Peter struggled to get this hope deeply into his thinking so he would be ready for anything!

And why did this evil world kill Peter? Because he tried to teach it this hope! It will persecute us for the same reason.

Even though Peter didn't know it, he wrote those hope-filled epistles mainly for us today.

This living hope motivated Peter. HE DIDN'T FACE HIS SAVAGE DEATH IN DISCOURAGEMENT!

We are entering into the greatest crisis ever. God is revealing the epistles of Peter to us so we can face our trials with nobility and dignity, as Peter did.

This is the living hope that no man could even imagine!

God has given us new revelation from Peter to prepare us for the future. This is not a book about fables. It's about your majestic, celestial potential. This is why you were born.

We must face this mad world with profound hope, as Peter did—not with bitterness.

NO MATTER HOW BAD IT GETS, THAT ETERNAL, LIVING HOPE IS ALWAYS THERE. Peter's vision of hope is a critical key to *finishing* our Work.

This stunning vision of hope is Peter's introduction to the trials described in 2 Peter 2.

The context of that vision is where Christ's own face shone as the sun! Christ prepared Peter specifically to give us this message today. This is the fantastic vision Peter was teaching—and this is what Christ wants us to understand in this end time.

This is the gospel—the good news of the coming Family of God! It's about children being born into God's Family—just like physical children are born into a physical family. This is the hope of all hopes—*if only men would believe!*

Do you deeply believe? Do you get it?

In these difficult times, we need to deepen and enhance this marvelous hope. We must WORK HARD to do so. If we do, NO TRIAL WILL STOP US. That hope will impact the individual contribution that each one of us makes to God's Work! It will feed our zeal and enthusiasm.

HOW QUICKLY COULD WE GROW AND DEVELOP SPIRITUALLY IF WE JUST GOT OURSELVES OUT OF THE WAY AND LET GOD FILL US WITH HIS MIND, HIS POWER, HIS HOPE? Considering what God is offering us, is there any room for arrogance or pride, or rebellion against God's government? Is there any reason we can't humble ourselves and become as little children?

We need the overview Peter had. If you understand what he was saying, "The Incredible Human Potential" seems like an inadequate title for that book!

THE ORIGIN OF PROPHECY

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20). Do you recognize that any prophecy that comes into this Church is based on God's

Word? It doesn't come from human beings. The rsv reads, "no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation."

"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy [Spirit]" (verse 21). God's revealed word doesn't come from men. The word *prophet* in the Old Testament means "an interpreter of God." In other words, God revealed Himself to these men, and they taught what He revealed! They would have been powerless without the Holy Spirit moving them. They were moved by the Holy Spirit. This is how God speaks to mankind. God gives each person on Earth the responsibility to know when men are moved by the Holy Spirit.

This is how we receive revelation today as well: GOD PUTS REVELATION INTO HIS CHURCH. THAT IS HOW HE SPEAKS TO US AND THE WORLD TODAY. THAT IS HOW THE LIVING GOD SPEAKS. Of course, He speaks through a man—but it is God's message!

Mr. Armstrong said that 90 percent of Bible prophecy is for our time today. God *must* REVEAL that prophecy for it to be worth anything!

Of course, the revelation He gives today is all based on Scripture, which is *not* subject to private interpretation. It cannot come by the will of man.

We must see the ORIGIN of that prophecy. It comes not from here on Earth, but from the THRONE OF GOD IN THE THIRD HEAVEN! If you have prophecy based on God's Word, that is where it came from!

God has revealed more prophecy faster to His very elect during the Laodicean era than perhaps any period in the Church's history. There is a practical reason why: Satan has been cast down and prophecies are being fulfilled both within the Church and on the world scene at a phenomenal rate. A number of scriptures indicate that God would reveal much during this last hour in human civilization. *God is revealing as quickly as events are unfolding*. After all, most of these events were prophesied.

We are living in a time of "no more delay" (Revelation 10:6, rsv). Events and prophecy have accelerated as never before.

Mr. Armstrong worked to teach us where the Church's prophecy originates. Ninety-five percent of God's people never got it—or if they did, they also lost it.

If the United States president were in town to speak, many people would go to hear him simply because of the *office* he holds. God has a spiritual office, occupied by a man, through which He gives revelation. We should want to hear what God says! What *men* say—apart from God—has little or no value.

Notice how the Apostle Paul came to know God's truth: "How that BY REVELATION he made known unto me the mystery..." (Ephesians 3:3). That is the same way God taught the mystery to us, through Mr. Armstrong.

Paul continued, "Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is *now revealed* unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (verse 5). Paul mentioned that the truth would be revealed to *apostles* and *PROPHETS*. That is how God speaks to His collective body. Paul is not talking about the Old Testament, but New Testament times!

Can you discern when God is speaking? If not, expect to be deceived.

GOD GIVES REVELATION TO HIS CHURCH *ONLY* THROUGH APOSTLES AND PROPHETS. People can denigrate me personally; they could make a list of all my faults and I would probably agree with a lot of what they said. Every leader in the Bible had flaws. But none of that means anything as long as God is using somebody!

People will look for anything they can find to demonize us. We must be clear about what we believe in order to stand up to the trials that await us. God says He won't test us beyond what we can stand, but you can be sure that our immediate future will be intensely challenging.

The leaders in God's Church are imperfect. The important question is, *ARE THEY STRIVING TO OVERCOME?* We are not arguing that we don't have flaws—but we do say that we are *WALKING IN THE WAY OF TRUTH*.

Of course that doesn't mean we never stumble. King David committed some serious sins—but he is still going to be my boss in the future, and yours!

This is how God works. He uses men. His truth flows down from heaven, through a man, to the ministry and God's people. God does everything decently and in an orderly fashion (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40). To reject that system is to deny God's rulership over His Church!

GOD SPEAKS TO HIS CHURCH! HE SPEAKS TO THE GROUP THAT FUL-

FILLS HIS COMMISSION. How *privileged* we are to hear Him and to do His Work.

The first chapter of this second epistle contains the heart of Peter's hopeful message. It is an inspiring and important introduction to the second chapter of this epistle. This second chapter is a scathing warning to the Church of God. That warning, like everything else in these epistles, is **PRIMARILY FOR OUR DAY.**

Chapter 3

Peter's Warning

THE EPISTLES OF THE APOSTLE PETER ARE LIKE A MINIATURE BIBLE. Peter gives the bad news, but he also gives you the good news. He issues the warning, but he wraps it in the most magnificent hope we could ever have.

Peter was the chief apostle for good reason. Studying his epistles helps us understand how spiritually qualified he truly was for that position. God inspired him to give a view of the whole Bible that is remarkably comprehensive and quite deep.

The second chapter of Peter's second epistle is extremely serious. The chief apostle has a scathing warning to deliver to the Church of God.

He immediately talks about vicious predators secretly coming in among the people of God: "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as *there shall be false teachers among you*, who privily [secretly or surreptitiously] shall bring in damnable [or destructive] heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Peter 2:1).

This is an end-time prophecy for the Laodicean churches and can afflict the very elect. As Jude said, teachers had *already* crept in. These predators are sneaking in among the brethren for dishonorable purposes. They float around, tossing out their bait of damnable heresies, waiting patiently for someone to bite.

Can God's people recognize destructive heresies when they hear them? Can they comprehend how deadly such critics are?

Do they know how to handle such problems? Are our ministers teaching them how to deal with this deadly deceit?

God tells us **SUCH PROBLEMS WILL BE AMONG US!** That is for certain.

These individuals are “even denying the Lord that bought them” with His blood, or “denying the Master,” as *Lange’s* expresses it. They throw off God’s government—because they can’t do their dirty work within its confines. They **DENY THEIR HEAD!** They’re not denying *a man* in an office. God says they’re denying their **HEAVENLY MASTER**, who should be ruling them! These people are proud and arrogant—not humble. They refuse to be taught!

These heresies are extremely damaging to God’s people. The rsv calls them “destructive heresies.” That is frighteningly emphasized by the fact that 95 percent have **TURNED AGAINST GOD**. Some of the most exalted men in God’s Church have come to accept such pathetic beliefs that it’s embarrassing! Someone got to them with destructive heresies!

Considering where many of the Laodiceans will end up, those heresies simply could not be more destructive! Peter prophesied that “many” members would be deceived.

Are false teachings contagious? “And **MANY** shall follow their pernicious [or destructive] ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of” (verse 2).

This is not about the way of the PCG—it’s about the way of the truth. You can and must *prove* what is truth and what is not truth.

God wants to know if you are grounded in the truth. If so, you can detect a false teacher, rebuke and expose him.

We are teaching God’s truth—not the ideas of men.

We are here to teach the **WAY OF TRUTH**. **WHEN SOMEONE SPEAKS AGAINST THAT WAY—THE WAY OF OUR FATHER—GOD’S SONS SHOULD STAND UP AND BE COUNTED!** *That’s my Father you’re talking about! This is a FAMILY matter!* We should take it **PERSONALLY!**

We have a wonderful opportunity to represent our Father and teach the way of truth. If someone takes that truth away, we must be willing to fight to get it back. We want to distribute our Father’s message to the world! If we love Him and Jesus Christ, we will finish their Work.

“And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time

lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (verse 3).

These men are *phony*—they speak *feigned words*. They are like a peddler or used car salesman—but they are MAKING MERCHANDISE OF YOU!

God tells them in clear terms: *You may be asleep—but YOUR DAMNATION IS NOT! You may be blind—but MY JUSTICE IS NOT!* Everything God has prophesied will come to pass just as He has said.

It is truly horrifying how successful these rebels have been: MANY—to the tune of 95 percent—have followed their destructive ways!

Spiritually, that is a mega-disaster. It is truly a shame on God’s people.

THE ANGELS THAT SINNED

At this point, Peter begins to paint a picture trying to communicate the scale of the tragedy within the Church of God.

“For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell [that is, restrained them to this Earth], and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (verse 4). *Lange’s* says that darkness is *the highest degree* of darkness.

This is what people are following who go after destructive heresies: DEMONS THAT ARE IN CHAINS OF DARKNESS!

This is the horrendous world Satan and the demons inhabit. And this world worships them.

God didn’t spare the angels that sinned. Those demons will receive severe judgment. They await “the blackness of darkness for ever” (Jude 13). They have that black future oppressing and weighing on them, and their best “relief” seems to come from the trouble they can cause God’s Church. They also love to see humanity suffer.

The parallel passage in Jude 6 says that the angels “kept not their first estate.” Lucifer and one third of the angels failed to rule this Earth with God’s government. They were dissatisfied with what they had; they felt God was withholding something from them and wanted higher offices. Once they let that thinking take root, it gradually grew until they all rebelled and fought against God and the righteous angels.

Lucifer disagreed with how God was ruling the universe. He was lusting for more power. He didn't like God's government based on His law. Those rebellious thoughts got out of control.

Do we back and support God's headquarters, or do we disagree with how God is ruling His Work through men?

Satan's thinking can afflict God's people and God's ministers. Satan injects it into all of us. We must guard our minds and make sure we expunge those thoughts, because if they take root, we will slip into serious spiritual peril.

If you simply grow in grace and knowledge of God's Word, you will be in the right office and position. Concentrate on growing spiritually, and let God worry about how you are used in the Body.

A PREACHER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

“And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly” (2 Peter 2:5).

Noah faced a world literally filled with evil—“every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5).

Christ said that just before His coming it was going to be like the days of Noah (Matthew 24:37). Also Daniel discussed “the latter time . . . when the transgressors are come to the full” (Daniel 8:23).

So today we face the same evil human nature that Noah encountered. That is another indication that Peter's epistles are for today.

Peter showed that Noah's time was a *type* of what we experience today. Noah only had his wife, three sons and their wives with him. And it is not clear just how much support he got from his immediate family members. But Noah knew that God and the Word were with him. He knew that was all the support he needed—he couldn't fail if his faith was strong!

It takes a lot of courage to be so alone yet stand up for God. But let's not feel sorry for ourselves because we are *a little flock*. Remember Noah.

Noah was “a preacher of righteousness.” He had a commission, as God's Church does today. In addition to building the

ark—a project that earned him nothing but scorn—Noah proclaimed God’s righteousness! The word *righteousness* in that verse refers to God’s righteousness. *Strong’s Concordance* defines *preacher* as “a herald, i.e. of divine truth,” or “a messenger of the authority of God.”

But *no one* believed Noah—not even one other family. In the world around him, people’s thoughts were on evil continually. Noah was the opposite—his thoughts were on righteousness continually. Of course he sinned, but he was a man of righteousness who was severely persecuted by a world of absolute evil. Quite a man.

You have to respect and admire Noah. Not only was he righteous, but he went out and proclaimed that righteousness!

That is what we must do as well. IT’S NOT ENOUGH TO WIN A COURT BATTLE AND GAIN THE RIGHTS TO MR. ARMSTRONG’S LITERATURE. GOD GAVE US ALL THAT WONDERFUL REVELATION SO WE WOULD PROCLAIM IT TO AN EVIL WORLD! He wants us to show the world where its real hope is.

Noah’s message was also similar to ours today: a message of warning. The Philadelphia Church of God proclaims a Noah message.

THE END OF ALL FLESH

In Genesis 6:13, during Noah’s day, God said, “The end of all flesh is come before me.” And so it has again. We face another END—this time, Christ is going to cut it short just before every human being would be killed.

Today, we talk about our number-one problem being human survival. Anyone with a little foresight can recognize that this world’s problems cannot be solved by men—but still they are unwilling to listen to God.

God is going to take mankind to the point where people will know there is no hope in man and they ARE willing to heed God’s Word—the Bible. The experiment of human government will prove itself a grandiose failure, and people will begin to recognize that they *do* need God’s help.

What a world that will be! When human arrogance has been leveled, people will be humble and childlike, ready to be taught by God!

But to reach that stage, mankind must experience destruction just short of destroying all humanity—every man, woman and child.

We need to help people understand that THIS WORLD IS ABOUT TO END—just as in the time of the Flood!

Noah believed what God said about the end of all flesh—enough to proclaim it to the world. This must be a part of our thinking. It must be real to us, as it was to Noah. Our hearts must be in God's future world, not Satan's present world. Then we will become like Noah, who defied Satan's civilization and proclaimed God's righteousness! Virtually alone, a son of God fulfilled his God-given commission!

For Noah's labors, God saved him and his family physically. In the midst of the frightfully bad news, Noah and his family were spared. That is good news—a big benefit of doing God's Work as He commands. Rewards always accompany obedience to God. We too must proclaim God's warning today to be saved physically—everybody else faces the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord!

SODOM AND GOMORRAH

Peter's warning continues: "And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into *ashes* condemned them with an overthrow, making them *an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly*" (2 Peter 2:6). According to *Strong's Concordance*, the word *ensample* means "an exhibit for imitation or warning."

WHY DID PETER USE THE EXAMPLE OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH? I DON'T THINK HE FULLY KNEW. THIS WARNING WASN'T FOR THE FIRST CENTURY; IT IS FOR THE END TIME, ABOUT WHICH CHRIST PROPHESED THAT *NO FLESH* WOULD BE SAVED ALIVE IF HE DIDN'T INTERVENE!

God inspired Peter with this end-time message in order to impress on our minds that *this sick, Sodom-and-Gomorrah world is about to perish* IN FIRE—NUCLEAR FIRE!

An older *Webster's* dictionary defined *sodomy* this way: "Sodom (Genesis 18:20); any sexual intercourse regarded as abnormal, as between persons of the same sex, especially males, or between a person and an animal." Sodom was known for some of the most vile sins ever committed by men—men who were made in the likeness of God and are here to develop His very character.

Today, we have become so “sophisticated” that sodomy, or homosexuality, is regarded as good, rather than the abomination God says it is (Romans 1:22-32).

The Bible is clear in its condemnation of the sins of Sodom (Isaiah 1:10; 3:9; Jeremiah 23:14)—and of the certainty of those sinners being severely punished (Isaiah 13:19; Jeremiah 49:18; Lamentations 4:6).

Are our nations afraid? No, but they shall be before it is over!

CIVILIZATION FACES NUCLEAR ANNIHILATION—AND YET THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ON THE MINDS OF MANY PEOPLE IS THE DRIVE TO LEGITIMIZE AND LEGALIZE HOMOSEXUAL MARRIAGE! Does that provide *hope* in the face of nuclear destruction? It is *extremely foolish* to ignore the looming dangers in order to pursue such immorality. People think that if they get caught up in these evil desires, they can forget about reality and about what God says.

God gives us a *specific* New Testament example in Peter (and Jude) of what happens if a city or nation is polluted with homosexuality. It is going to be destroyed the same way that depraved Sodom and Gomorrah were—huge cities are to be left in ashes!

Do we see how urgent our message is?

This sin of sodomy reaches the peak of twisting the human mind. God’s *total* destruction of great cities shows how God feels about people being defiled by homosexuality.

THE EXTREME PUNISHMENT FITS THE EXTREME OF *FAMILY* CRIME.

Most professing Christians say they believe in the New Testament. Here are *specific* examples with horrendous warnings from God. Still, mankind just scoffs at God’s thunderous voice.

Any person who honestly studies the Bible, knows that God labels homosexuality as an abomination!

Homosexual marriage is the *antithesis* of true hope! Satan knows that. He deceives people into thinking it is *FREEDOM* to get entangled in something like that. Oh—how this world needs freedom! But not the false freedom of sin, which is actually slavery.

FAMILY IS THE MOST SACRED OF ALL INSTITUTIONS. When a family obeys God, it produces strong, beautiful children. When those children are taught God’s way, they just *amaze* you. Strong families are the backbone of a nation. WHEN FAMILIES FALL APART, NATIONS FALL.

Marriage and family are God-plane relationships that prepare us to enter our marriage with Jesus Christ, and our place in the Family of God. It is man's *only* hope.

DISTORTED AND QUEER SATAN HATES THAT! He wants to OBLITERATE FAMILY! He wants to DESTROY MARRIAGE and BLOT IT OUT FOREVER! He never had the opportunity to enter God's Family and be a *son*. That is the potential of human beings *only*.

Lawless Satan is the motivator behind the same-sex marriage movement, which is defying God to His face! Under Satan's influence, FAMILIES HAVE BECOME SICK—AND THEY ARE PRODUCING SODOM AND GOMORRAH.

Christ said that "by their fruits you shall know them."

YOU CANNOT UNDERSTAND THE MAGNITUDE OF THIS SIN UNLESS YOU UNDERSTAND GOD'S MASTER PLAN FOR FAMILY!

We must comprehend what we are dealing with. WE ARE WITNESSING THE TWISTING AND DESTROYING OF THE GOSPEL OF GOD!

The gospel is the good news of the coming Family of God. Satan is trying to blot out any hope of understanding the Family gospel. He has sold people on the idea that they can twist and distort family any way they please and it won't matter.

That is not what our Creator says! He turned Sodom and Gomorrah INTO ASHES—AS AN EXAMPLE FOR US—to warn us of how He would punish for that sin!

Is there a greater physical warning in the Bible than this?

When two angels, appearing as men, came to the city, the men of Sodom wanted to have sexual relations with them. Even when those evil men were STRUCK BLIND, that didn't stop them—they *kept right on coming!* Can you reason with people like that? No more than you can reason with the homosexual movement today—they don't retain God in their knowledge, so God has given them over to a *reprobate mind* (Romans 1:28). That is the sick result of such burning lust.

Even churches that claim to represent Jesus Christ openly advocate homosexuality—saying the Bible is silent on the issue or, worse, approves of it. Some claim that King David and even Jesus Christ were homosexual! We ought not be too disturbed when people like that disagree with us.

People try to make homosexuality look loving and balanced and solid and sound-minded—but THEY ARE DEFYING GOD, AND THEY WILL END UP IN ASHES!

More and more, the courts in biblical Israel are approving of sodomy. It's being pushed and pressured into young and impressionable minds. Isaiah says, "THE WHOLE HEAD IS SICK" (Isaiah 1:5). ISRAEL IS FULL OF SODOM-AND-GOMORRAH SIN—AND IT IS ABOUT TO WITNESS SODOM-AND-GOMORRAH DESTRUCTION!

Very soon, our cities will be leveled and our people exterminated if they don't repent!

The history of Sodom and Gomorrah cries out a SEVERE WARNING. When cities become steeped in homosexual depravity, LOOK OUT: They are about to be destroyed by fire!

God didn't spare the sinning angels—He didn't spare the sinners in Noah's day—He didn't spare the sinners in Sodom and Gomorrah. GOD DOES NOT SPARE PEOPLE WHO COMMIT SUCH VILE SIN. HE OBLITERATES THEM AND EVERYTHING AROUND THEM!

Peter prophesied of the Sodom and Gomorrah society we are living in today. We can become dulled to homosexuality and other immorality in this world if we are not careful. As the Bride of Christ, do you feel the same way Jesus Christ does about it?

God "spared not" the sinning angels. And He "spared not" the totally depraved world in Noah's time. He obliterated Sodom and Gomorrah with fire. God gives us these destructive examples of our *universe, world* and *cities* reduced to ashes to drive home the point that the nations of Israel today are also about to become ashes! The nuclear bombs are about to fall!

Do we believe God?

God *spared not* in the past. And our nations are going to be *spared not*.

The lesson is that God does not spare sinners. And if mankind doesn't finally repent, they will become ashes forever in a lake of fire.

Sin has no future!

God chose Israel anciently to set a righteous example for the nations of the world. But it failed miserably.

Where are the nations of Israel leading the world today? Into Sodom and Gomorrah! So God is using the Church today to set an example of how God commands His people to live.

Soon the whole world will learn that lesson.

"And [God] *delivered just Lot*, vexed with the filthy conversation [conduct] of the wicked" (2 Peter 2:7). God delivers

just people. Lot had a rough time living in the wicked city of Sodom. *Vexed* in this verse means he was *grievously pained* by the appalling homosexuality that saturated his surroundings.

“(For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds)” (verse 8). This word *vexed* means *tormented*. The people’s sodomy (and other sins) tormented him because of his righteousness.

“The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (verse 9). God knows how to destroy and how to deliver. He physically delivered Lot and his daughters. He delivered Noah and his family. He will deliver His people from the disasters to strike in this end time. And He will destroy sinners.

That is God’s message to our time, and great cities will become ashes unless people heed it! God is about to obliterate ALL but the *tiny few* who heed God’s message.

WE MUST FULFILL OUR COMMISSION! WE MUST TELL THIS WORLD WHAT IS COMING AND WHY!

Satan has gotten in our face with this evil. The sons of God ought to be at least as bold as he is—for God. What is highly esteemed in this world is an abomination to God. We must stand up and tell this world what God says!

TWO HOPES

Of course, as with the Flood, there were a few spared from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: Lot and his daughters were *brought out*. The same will have to happen in the near future—God will have to pull His people *out* if we are to be saved. We will have to be taken to a place of safety.

God’s people have *two hopes*—a physical hope and a spiritual hope.

Of course, we don’t want to emphasize the physical over the spiritual, but it is nevertheless an exciting hope. We are physical beings, and as we see the storm gathering, we could get fearful and depressed if we don’t see some way to escape it (Revelation 12:14).

God’s ministers must make not only the place of safety real to people, but the *need* for the place of safety—because of the

approaching cataclysm, which will be worse than the Flood, worse than Sodom! Can you imagine our great cities becoming ashes? This is Christ's warning for our day!

Jude, in his epistle, also talks about the examples of the Flood and Sodom. In both of these instances, there is a great physical hope for God's people *if we can stand alone like Lot and Noah*. Most of God's people have chosen instead to go along with the world—a choice that may be easier in the short run but leads to unimaginable misery and death!

Lot and his two daughters fled Sodom. His carnal-minded sons-in-law mocked the warning they received and were left behind. Lot's daughters had to *leave their husbands-to-be* to be saved physically!

In the future, we will all need that kind of faith. In some cases, we may have to walk away from family. In fact, we will probably all have to leave behind some people we are close to.

It takes strong faith to follow our Father. Will you have the faith to pick up and leave *anybody* for God?

It is always painful to lose people. The chances are very high that we will *physically* lose those we leave behind when we go to the place of safety. Of course, losing a son or daughter physically is very temporary. But in order to do that, our minds cannot be mired in the present—they must be firmly set on the future. The FUTURE is everything!

Lot's wife could not reconcile herself to the idea of her world being destroyed. Human nature loves this world, and that is why people keep trying to save it. But there is nothing in this satanic world to love, apart from the incredible human potential. We must get beyond the longing of Lot's wife, or we won't have the faith we need to FLEE! We cannot look back.

Lot's wife looked back at Sodom and was turned to a pillar of salt. She still yearned for the sodomite lifestyle.

She left a powerful warning for God's very elect today. THIS EVIL WORLD MUST HAVE NO APPEAL FOR US. OUR DESIRE IS TO GET OUT OF SODOM. We must have the desire to flee. Huge metropolitan areas are going to be left without an inhabitant. God's protection must be real to us.

This world is a sinking ship. We must get our minds off worldly ways and onto our commission. There should be *nothing* in this miserable, evil world that we want. We should

only want to finish our commission, so we can create a new world with God!

FEW ARE SAVED

Noah and his wife, their three sons and their wives—eight people—were spared in the Flood. Lot and his two daughters—three—were saved from Sodom.

What is so shocking about these examples is HOW FEW God has been able to save physically!

Peter makes this point: “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once *the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah*, while the ark was a preparing, wherein FEW, that is, *eight souls* were saved by water” (1 Peter 3:18-20).

While Noah was proclaiming the message, God had to wait and watch how the people responded. This verse emphasizes the fact that, while many were warned, FEW were saved.

That is how it is in this world: IN TIMES OF CRISIS, ONLY A FEW REMAIN WITH GOD.

God's true Church will never have a large number of members as many other churches have. That is reality.

But realize: That won't be the case for much longer. We are about to witness a revolution!

After the Flood, there was a small revolution—but soon a worldwide revolution is coming. The world will be virtually destroyed again, and then Christ will return and REVOLUTIONIZE THIS EARTH!

God's few MUST believe that, if we are to be delivered.

Many believe that God and Satan are in a contest for winning souls. But look at this history—in Noah's day, eight were saved; in Lot's day, three were saved. God really lost those battles, didn't He?

No, He did not! God didn't lose at all. He is allowing mankind to go its evil way during this 6,000-year period. The world is not yet judged; its judgment is coming.

Right now, God is working with just a few.

There are always a *few* God can use, who will stand up and proclaim God's righteousness in the midst of indescribable evil—when “the transgressors are come to the full,” as the Prophet Daniel described it. One man against the world—10,000 saints (Jude 14) in a world of 6 billion people—SO FEW, BUT BACKED BY THE POWER OF ALMIGHTY GOD!

Our message is not just a global message about a nuclear holocaust. It's also about ruling this Earth and the universe, which the angels were unable to do.

THE ONLY PERSON GOD CAN SAVE TODAY IS THE PERSON WHO CAN STAND ALONE—AS NOAH DID! God calls “one of a city, and two of a family” (Jeremiah 3:14). For our courageous Work, God will give us a headquarters position *forever!* (Revelation 3:12).

Like Noah, we must *walk with God*. That means being filled with God's precious righteousness and proclaiming it—as Noah did.

God is building the team that will usher in and prepare for the very return of Jesus Christ to this Earth—an event that is coming fast!

OUR NOAH WORK

Peter's use of Noah's example contains two messages: one about the destruction of an evil world, the other about a little remnant that stands up to that evil world and is protected.

Christ said this end time would be as it was in Noah's day—man's thoughts are again on evil continually. Of course, we must give God's warning message—but there is another message of great hope for God's people. You can look at Noah's example and see that God saves a few.

God's people must back and support our Noah message. It is a message about the end of the world and of man's rule on Earth. It's about standing alone and using the power of God!

Why does God contrast world destruction with eight people? He is speaking directly to us, to encourage us to face what is coming!

It doesn't make any difference if we're alone *physically*—
GOD'S SAINTS KNOW THEY ARE NEVER ALONE!

What encouragement God gives us. We must trust our Father, just as children trust their parents. He knows so much

more than we do, and He is working out His perfect plan.

God's Work has always been a work of faith in the face of odds. It requires spiritual courage, which is the highest level of faith.

Look at our college, for example. It is small and unaccredited in this world. It takes faith for a young person to come here. But those who come recognize that this is the only college that will survive into the Millennium! They come here out of a desire to join us in fulfilling our commission to the world. That takes gigantic vision!

If we see what God is doing, we recognize that His royal college is preparing people for world rulership! It is accredited by God!

In His true Church, God is training personnel for His eternal headquarters—individuals who can work with Jesus Christ and know His mind and His strategy and how He operates—individuals who simply BELIEVE GOD and can be trusted to do just what He commands—individuals who deeply, passionately love God and wrap their lives around His plan and purpose!

The depravity in society today is a sign that it is about to become ashes. That is an unpopular message. We need all the courage and all the power of God to follow Noah's tremendous example and do this job.

DESPISING GOVERNMENT

Peter had to correct a government problem within God's Church.

“But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities” (2 Peter 2:10).

We should be an example of obedience to Christ and His government. We need to measure ourselves according to God's government and God's law. That applies to me as much as to anyone else—when I am wrong about something, I want to know. We are not here to promote ourselves, but to promote the truth of God and our Head, Jesus Christ.

Peter is speaking of people who *despise government*—or *lordship*, it could read. One commentary says, “They resist and reject the kingly glory of Christ.”

And they are *inside the Church*. Primarily, God is referring to the *Laodiceans*.

Just because we may speak favorably toward God's government doesn't mean we have the deeds to support those words.

One of the Laodicean churches has eliminated the scripturally based ministerial ranks that Mr. Armstrong used; all ministers are local elders in their respective areas. That sounds so equitable and loving, but they are rejecting God's government. The thinking is that if everyone has the same rank, there won't be any competition in the ministry. But that is just carnal reasoning—and THEY ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE! GOD TAUGHT THEM HIS GOVERNMENT—AS HE DID LUCIFER. If God isn't behind it, it drives Him right out of the Church!

How could you convince the men who made that decision that they *despise government*? It appears it will take more than words to reach them—but God will somehow get them to recognize that they *hate* His government.

“But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption” (verse 12). These individuals are like “brute beasts.” How? Animals have no potential for eternal life—they just live for a short time and die. Likewise, a person who doesn't use God's Holy Spirit will have no eternal life.

Mankind was made to live forever. But if men don't repent of their sins and submit to God's government, their future is the same as brute beasts!

Fifty percent of God's people have already been prophesied to have that ignominious end. We all must deeply repent to receive *the gift of eternal life*.

God even calls what is considered the greatest religion on Earth a beast. That is because it supports a political beast—not God.

Why should we be impressed by rebellious men who are to die like beasts? We should honor God by looking to His leaders like Noah.

In the book of Revelation, the most fearsome war-making machine this world has ever seen is also called a “beast,” and it is guided by a religious “beast” (Revelation 13, 17). It too will last only a short time and then die forever! They have no more value than beasts if they don't repent.

“Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord” (2 Peter 2:11). The righteous angels set a good example for us in respecting God’s government. Satan has been condemned to the blackness of darkness forever. But God still leaves him on his earthly throne until Christ returns. The angels respect that office.

Jude gets even more specific on this subject. “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 9).

The archangel Michael has had many battles with Satan. However, he has always respected Satan’s office.

THERE IS A REASON WHY PETER AND JUDE DISCUSS SATAN AND THE DEMONS IN THE CONTEXT OF SODOMY—THEY ARE BEHIND IT! AND SATAN IS BEHIND THOSE LAODICEANS AND OTHERS WHO DESPISE GOD’S GOVERNMENT!

As Mr. Armstrong used to say so often, “government is everything.” Satan is the antithesis of God’s view of government.

The archangels, Michael and Gabriel, work behind the scenes for God’s very elect against Satan and the demons.

This world will never have peace as long as it remains in the clutches of carnal human governments. It speaks evil of what it doesn’t understand. It doesn’t know God or understand His government. Only the government of God can save us.

None of us has any potential unless we rid ourselves of human nature. Human nature simply will not accept the rule of God. People will not listen to a Noah or a prophet of God today, so they have to deal with weapons of mass destruction and human annihilation!

SONS OF THE FLESH

Peter continues his condemnation of the Laodiceans: “And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time” (2 Peter 2:13). Normally people commit their rebellious deeds in the shadows of the night, but these are brazen rebels. They revel in sin at high noon.

“Having eyes full of adultery, and that *cannot cease from sin . . .*” (verse 14). They are hooked on sin like heroin—like the

homosexuals in Genesis 19. Their willpower is destroyed. That is what sin does to a person—it saps you of the will to live righteously.

“Which have *forsaken the right way*, and are gone astray”—the Laodiceans had the right way but forsook it—“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” (verses 15-16). These people had the right way, but then forsook it. Jude also uses the example of Balaam—and it is a very apt illustration of what has happened to the Laodiceans.

Peter refers to him as “Balaam the son of Bosor.” *Bosor* means *flesh*. Balaam was actually a son of carnality. He loved the way of Satan—of this world. He thought he was a godly man, but he was actually *mad*—so mad that God inspired his ass to speak to him and tell him about his madness.

It’s as if God is telling these false prophets that they have less wisdom than a donkey!

That is what we are dealing with spiritually! Look at the ideas the Laodiceans are promulgating. Some of them are truly asinine, considering what those people of God once knew!

“These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever” (verse 17). Water represents the Holy Spirit. God’s people should be full of that living water! It should flow into and out of our lives every day. But the Laodiceans are dried up of that life-giving Spirit.

The blackness, or “mist of darkness,” hangs over them. This chilling horror hovers over them every day.

“For, uttering loud boasts of folly, they entice with licentious passions of the flesh men who have barely escaped from those who live in error” (verse 18, *RSV*). This is talking about people who have “barely escaped”—that is, they are new in God’s Church.

Satan is subtle. He has different messages for different people—he knows our weaknesses and how to attack us specifically. He knows how to reach prospective members. God’s ministers must be watchful and help equip the brethren in areas where they are weak, so they can withstand these attacks.

THE LAW OF LIBERTY

“While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage” (verse 19).

James 1:25 talks about God’s “law of liberty.” These individuals promise freedom and liberty—but they never talk about the “law of liberty”! They offer a false freedom—a lawless liberty, which is really slavery. They talk about *love*, but it is a shallow, meaningless love, not grounded in God’s law.

The U.S. Supreme Court has offered sodomites “liberty.” Instead, they should be giving them the LAW OF LIBERTY. They themselves are servants of corruption and rebellion. By that logic, a *heroin addict* is free, because he can do whatever he wants!

People say homosexuality is freedom—but it is actually destroying the vision of the Family of God. Pornography rakes in billions of dollars in the U.S. each year because it is protected as “free” expression—but it is actually shattering families and enslaving people to sexual addiction, poverty and all kinds of problems.

No wonder God has to topple the U.S.—this nation is polluting and corrupting the whole world through television, movies, newspapers, magazines and the Internet.

If we’re going to talk about liberty, let’s talk about the LAW OF LIBERTY—a law directed by the government of God.

You can’t teach the law to carnal people unless you have the government of God, and people come under that government in a childlike and submissive way.

“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through *the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning” (verse 20). We really need the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The word *knowledge* in this verse is not *gnosis*, from which we get our word *knowledge*; it’s *epignosis*. *Epi* means intense or intensive; it expresses a more *thorough participation* in the knowledge. As Mr. Armstrong always said, if you don’t put your heart in this Work, you won’t grow. *Epignosis* is knowledge that directs your life—it is intense knowledge that causes us to want to give our lives to this Work. That is the kind of knowledge we

need, Peter says, if we are to escape “the pollutions of the world.”

This knowledge causes us to submit to our Lord, or Master, and then let Him empower us with His Holy Spirit and become our Savior. People in the world talk about their Lord and Savior all the time, but they are just empty, meaningless words.

The Laodiceans had that knowledge—but then lost it and got entangled in the world again.

God is going to judge them harshly for turning their back on Him and returning to sin.

“For it had been better for them *not* to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (verses 21-22). What an ugly picture—and a frightful fate to befall God’s people!

The Laodiceans are *blind!* How else can you explain their rejecting the transcendent reward God is extending to them? What obstacle prevents them from accepting this masterpiece of God’s creation—God recreating Himself?

THE LAST DAYS

“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts” (2 Peter 3:3).

The rsv reads, “*First of all* you must understand this . . .” Why is this emphasized by Peter?

Lange’s Commentary says that this is referring to “the last of the days.” That is, the “farthest” or “uttermost.” This is similar to what the Apostle John described as *the last hour*. And the times are growing rapidly worse.

Lange’s explains: “[T]hey shall come in the spirit of scoffing, as scoffers, walking, etc.’ [They will not only be scoffers, but they will come in scoffing, like those of whom the Psalmist says, that their delight is in cursing, and that THEY CLOTHE THEMSELVES WITH IT, as it were, with a raiment (Psalm 109:16-17); . . .]”

Satan has been cast down and is full of wrath because his time is so short (Revelation 12:12). Demons are racing around like mad dogs, stirring up all kinds of rage. It intensifies as Satan’s spirit permeates humanity. People become *clothed* in a scoffing spirit.

In this end time, people are in a spirit of scoffing. They don't realize it, but by being like this, they are *fulfilling prophecy!*

Many today scoff at God and at the Word of God. For example, when the Bible condemns homosexuality—so clearly that anybody can understand it—even religious leaders who claim to represent God stand up and say it's good. There will be a reckoning for that! God holds ministers accountable more than other people—and that is true many times over of God's true ministers.

In the last days, that verse says. You can see that Peter's thinking was focused on the end of the world. We, too, need to get our minds on the end of the world. It didn't happen in Peter's time—but *it is about to happen today!* We are living through the last few minutes of mankind's rule over this Earth!

Like Lot's wife, most people cannot face the fact that this world is about to end. Even as they read daily headlines about the proliferation of terrifying weapons of mass destruction, they SCOFF!

Christ said it would be like Noah's time in these latter days. But evil men scoff today at the Bible teaching about Noah and the Flood (2 Peter 3:4-7)—just as they did anciently. They scoff at Christ's words.

They *willfully* refuse to see.

How can God reach their hardened minds?

God's very elect must tell people what is coming. We must endeavor to get them to face reality!

As we do so, they will fight it. But when it is all over, they will say, *There really was a prophet of God in our midst.* They will recognize their own foolishness for rejecting the message of God.

First of all, though, God's people must understand deeply that the era of man ruling man is about over. Mankind's end is near, and we all need to understand that to our core.

What insight Peter gives us into what God expects us to accomplish!

THE SABBATH REST

“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” (verse 8).

What does that really mean?

“Be not ignorant,” Peter wrote. *Don’t let this fact escape you.* He really emphasized this. Why? What’s so important about it?

God inhabits eternity (Isaiah 57:15). Our destiny is to become members of His Family, so God wants our minds oriented toward eternity. But eternity is a towering concept, so Peter tries to break it down for us.

We are preparing first of all for a thousand-year Millennium. After that, we will begin the process of spreading God’s government out into the universe and to eternity!

This is a *universe-size concept*. We must not live in the present. We must live in the *future*—as God does.

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

We must have faith in our great God—He will keep His promise of this wonderful world that is to come. If we believe that, we know that God’s Kingdom is almost here!

A thousand years is like a day to God. He views 7,000 years as a week. The 7,000-year plan of God is typed by the seven-day week.

To understand what Peter is really saying, we need more perspective on this truth.

“Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths [holy days] ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people” (Exodus 31:13-14). The Sabbath is extremely important to God. He takes it very seriously.

“Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord . . . It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days [a type of the 6,000 years of mankind’s rule] the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day [a type of the coming Millennium] he rested, and was refreshed” (verses 15, 17).

Is this the kind of Sabbath we keep?

God created the Sabbath by resting, and it refreshed Him. He looked at His creation and at the human beings He had made in His image and likeness. He considered His master plan, and how those first six days of the re-creation were a type of the coming 6,000 years He would allot to mankind's rule on Earth. Then He thought on that seventh thousand-year period, during which He will usher in His Kingdom and govern the world. He meditated deeply on that future—and the way He kept the Sabbath really inspired and encouraged Him! He was lifted up and refreshed! He looked back on His creation, and He looked forward to the time when He would be able to give ALL MANKIND REST FROM SIN! He anticipated being able to refresh *all of mankind* with the Millennium and the rule of Jesus Christ.

This begins to give us an idea of what Peter was really talking about in his epistle!

“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into HIS REST, any of you should seem to come short of it” (Hebrews 4:1). That *rest* is the Millennium, which is typed by the Sabbath—a millennial rest from sin. We must not fall short of attaining it!

“For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it [without faith, God's Word won't truly profit anyone]. For *we which have believed do enter into rest*, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day [the Millennium] on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief” (verses 2-6). We must believe!

“Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day [ancient Israel didn't receive this promise]. There remaineth therefore a rest [margin: 'keeping of a Sabbath'] to the people of God. For

he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his" (verses 7-10).

God's people need to cease from their work on the Sabbath—as all mankind will in the Millennium. Man will CEASE from his OWN WORKS!

We must keep the Sabbath day this way—and look forward to the time when the whole world will be celebrating it. Mankind will see that a thousand years is as a day, and they will have a vision that will truly refresh and inspire them: a vision of the plan of God!

Look back at the physical creation and God's transcendent plan to recreate Himself in man, and look to that glorious future, and you can understand more deeply what Peter means by saying, "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."

Let's keep our minds on this wonderful and inspiring future!

Proper Sabbath-keeping helps us think like God! We *labor spiritually* on the Sabbath to etch this vision into our minds. THE SABBATH IS A DAY FOR BUILDING HOPE!

I believe Peter could have said, "Just keep the Sabbath the right way, and you'll begin to think this way yourself: *a thousand years is as one day.*"

If we don't keep the Sabbath properly, we'll never think like God. And if we don't think like God, we will never be able to complete the job He has given us.

The Sabbath pictures the culmination of God's 7,000-year plan. As we keep it, we see the outcome of today's events, and we expect the world to change! That is what we live for! We know that 6,000 years is like six days to God—and it is about over!

The Sabbath should energize our vision and our understanding of why we are here on Earth. It keeps us happy and motivated and moving forward. You will never build the hope Peter is talking about without proper Sabbath-keeping. Without the Sabbath, we are stuck in the present. *With* a proper Sabbath, we are refreshed like God, ready for the challenges of the coming week.

WE MUST ALWAYS KEEP OURSELVES FOCUSED AND THINKING LIKE GOD. THE SABBATH IS THE PRIMARY WAY TO DO THAT IN THE WEEK,

AS IT GIVES US MORE TIME TO DO THE SPIRITUAL WORK THAT KEEPS US LOOKING TO GOD AND LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE. IT FILLS US WITH HIS HOPEFUL VISION.

Have a bad Sabbath, and you'll have a bad week. Have a good Sabbath, and you'll think of 1,000 years as a day!

“Looking for and HASTING 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?” (2 Peter 3:12). The word *hasting* could read, “hasting the coming” (see King James reference). *Strong's* defines *hasting* as “to ‘speed,’ i.e. urge on (diligently or earnestly) . . .”

The word *hasting* is used six times in the New Testament—each time it means *to make haste*.

Can we hasten the Day of the Lord? I believe we can. The Bible discusses “time being cut short.”

God's Work can't end until it is finished. But if we are intensely urgent, we can do it in less time. We must do all we can to end this nightmare world as fast as we can.

The whole world groans as it waits for the sons of God (Romans 8:19-23). It certainly appears to me that we can end that massive groan quicker by working harder.

May God help us to do all we can.

Peter grew quickly and became the chief apostle. He wanted all of God's people to follow his example as he followed Christ.

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen” (2 Peter 3:18, RSV).

That is a message filled with hope!

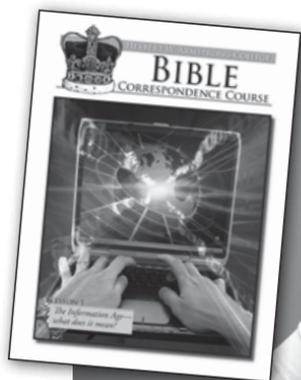
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