

The Word of Righteousness

The Government of God and Entrance into the Kingdom

Both of Peter's Epistles are concerned with the government of God, taking the divine economy of God as the focus and central point. The subject of the first Epistle is the Christian life under the government of God, showing that the Christian life and the government of God go together as a pair. Peter reveals that our God is a God of grace, gracing us continually that we may enjoy Him and live Him (1 Pet. 1:2, 10, 13; 2:19-20; 3:7; 4:10; 5:5, 10, 12; 2 Pet. 1:2; 3:18), and He is a God of glory, seeking to express Himself in splendor (1 Pet. 1:7-8, 21; 4:11, 13-14; 5:1, 4, 10-11; 2 Pet. 1:3, 17; 3:18). However, the Epistles of Peter reveal that God is also a God of government, the governing, administrating, judging God, who is judging everyone and everything according to His righteousness and holiness (1 Pet. 1:15-17; 2:23; 3:12, 14, 18; 4:17-18; 2 Pet. 3:10-12). This judgment begins from His chosen people, His elect, His own household. As God's chosen race, His particular possession (1 Pet. 2:9), the dispersed and chosen sojourners—the suffering and persecuted New Testament believers—are under God's governmental dealing for a positive purpose.

The subject of the second Epistle is the divine provision and the divine government. God is not only governing us through judgment, but He is also providing us with whatever we need, supplying us all things to live a holy life, a Christian life, under His government (2 Pet. 1:3-4; Lee¹, *First Peter* 11). On the one hand, God is dispensing Himself in His divine economy into the believers in order that they may partake of the divine nature and grow in the divine life unto the full expression of the divine attributes in our human virtues (vv. 5-8). On the other hand, He is dealing righteously with the believers through various judgments that they may partake of His righteousness and holiness. As a result, the believers are being sanctified to be holy as God is holy, even to become God Himself in His attribute of holiness (1 Pet. 1:15-16; Heb. 12:9-10). These matters are adequately presented in "The Government of God: The Triune God in His Administration," published in the previous issue of this journal (*Affirmation & Critique*, XIII.1, April 2008: 28-37). The reader is encouraged to begin his study there.

The early apostles, such as Paul, John, and Peter, participated in the same, unique ministry, the ministry of the New Testament (2 Pet. 3:15-16; 2 Cor. 4:1). In God's

New Testament economy there is only one category of teaching revealed and recognized by God—the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42; 2 Pet. 3:2; Jude 17). Nevertheless, under the sovereignty of God the style, terminology, and utterance of the apostles differed to some degree. Thus, Peter's presentation of certain crucial matters is unique and outstanding in the entire divine revelation. The Epistles of Peter show God's universal government as no other books of the New Testament do, and he uses a number of unique terms that are used not even by Paul in his writings. In this article we will consider in particular Peter's view and utterance concerning the government of God, the judgment of the believers, judgment according to works, governmental forgiveness, the salvation of our souls, the salvation to be received at the revelation of Jesus Christ, and the entrance into the kingdom. In the following issue of this journal, we will consider the day of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:10, 12) and other matters related to the government of God in the writings of Peter. In these matters, Peter confirms, strengthens, and develops the word of righteousness in the New Testament (Heb. 5:13), the word concerning the believers' accountability and responsibility before God under His government and their judgment for reward or discipline.

The Universal Government of God on All His Creatures

God's government is universal and deals with all His creatures that He may have a clean and pure universe (2 Pet. 3:13) in order to express Himself. Since the two Epistles of Peter are concerned with the government of God, the judgment of God and of the Lord is referred to repeatedly as one of the main items (Lee, *First Peter* 269). God's judgment began from the angels who did not keep their own principality, their original dignity and position, but abandoned their own dwelling place (heaven) to come to earth at Noah's time to commit fornication with the daughters of men (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Gen. 6:2). According to the sequence of historical facts in 2 Peter 2, these angels were the first fallen ones in the universe, taking Satan as their leader in his rebellion against God. God did not spare these angels but delivered them to gloomy pits, having cast them down to Tartarus where they are kept for the judgment of the great day (v. 4; 1 Pet. 3:19; Matt. 25:41).

The exercise of God's government through the agency of His judgment is also upon all men, beginning with the generations of men in the Old Testament. God did not spare the ancient world at the time of Noah when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly (2 Pet. 2:5; 3:6; Gen. 6:5-7, 11-13, 17). This was God's first judgment on the world of men. Similarly, He reduced to ashes the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and condemned them to ruin, setting them as an example to those who intend to live an ungodly life (2 Pet. 2:6). At the time of the flood, Noah, a herald of righteousness, was guarded with seven others, and out of Sodom and Gomorrah God rescued righteous Lot. Verse 9 says, "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of trial and how to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment." Whether one is righteous and godly or unrighteous and ungodly is crucial in regard to God's governmental judgment. To be righteous is to be right with man before God, and to be godly is to express God before man. This was the manner of life that Noah and Lot lived, a manner of life that spared them from God's governmental judgment according to His righteousness.

In the New Testament times, God's judgment will be particularly severe on false teachers and heretical mockers (vv. 1-3, 10-22; 3:1-9). First Peter 4:5 says that revilers and slanderers also will "render an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." To render an account is to relate to God all that one has done and spoken in his entire life. This reveals the government of God over all men. He is ready to judge all, both the living and the dead. Thus, God's judgment is His governmental administration by which He deals with the situation among men (Recovery Version, 2 Pet. 2:5, note 1; 1 Pet. 4:5, note 2).

The Government of God over His Own Household

First Peter 4:17 says, "It is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God." God's judgment is universal, dealing with angels, all men, and all matters. In this age, however, God first exercises His judgment on the believers as the members of His household so that He can have the standing to clear up the whole earth and even the whole universe, eventually consuming the universe by fire and producing new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:12-13). In order to have such a righteous ground, God has appointed His chosen ones to be the first subjects of His government, which is carried out mainly through judgment.

The sufferings they undergo in fiery persecution are used by Him as a means to judge them that they may be disciplined, purified, and separated from the unbelievers and not have the same destiny as they. Hence, such disciplinary judgment begins from His own household, and it is not exercised just once or twice but is being carried out continuously until the Lord's coming...

From this house, as His own house, God begins His governmental administration by God's disciplinary judgment over His own children, that He may have strong ground to judge, in His universal kingdom, those who are disobedient to His gospel and rebellious toward His government. (Recovery Version, 1 Pet. 4:17, notes 1 and 2).

First Peter 1:17 says, "If you call as Father the One who without respect of persons judges according to each one's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear." This verse speaks of the Father as the Judge of each one, particularly of the believers. However, the Father's judgment here is not the final judgment of man. John 5:22 says, "Neither does the Father judge anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son," and Acts 10:42 concurs concern-

ing the Son: "He has charged us to proclaim to the people and solemnly testify that this is the One who was designated by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead." In the economical operation of the Divine Trinity, and based on the accomplishments and attainments

of the Lord in His death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ has been given the authority to judge both the living and the dead for their final destiny. At His coming back, before the millennium, the resurrected Christ will judge the living on His throne of glory (Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Tim. 4:1), and after the millennium He will judge the dead on the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15). Therefore, the judging of the Father spoken of in 1 Peter 1:17 is something other than the judgment at the throne of glory or at the great white throne. John N. Darby explains,

Observe, here, that he is not speaking of the final judgment of the soul. In that sense "the Father judgeth no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son." The thing spoken of here is the daily judgment of God's government in this world, exercised with regard to His children. Accordingly it says, "the time of your sojourn here." It is a judgment applied to christian life. (*Synopsis* 377-378)

Again Darby says, "'God our Father judges to save.' Scripture tells us (the Lord Himself says), 'The Father judgeth no man.' [Father] is a name of grace and

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relationship...The Father judges in chastising His children" (*Writings* 31:101). And again,

As regards our sojourning *in this world*, the Father does judge (1 Pet. 1:17)...This judgment is carried into effect in the holiness of His nature against evil, and in His fatherly care of us in holiness: as it is written, "Holy Father, keep through thine own name," &c. (John 17:11.) And so we have to judge ourselves; and if we do not, we are judged of the Lord. There is His government in this respect. (1 Cor. 10:31, 32.) It is chastening. (10:370)

Being Disciplined in the Flesh by God, the Loving Father

It is crucial to see that the Father's judgment mentioned by Peter is the present, daily judgment of God's government in relation to the members of His household. This "paternal chastisement" (Lange 82) is manifested in various fiery ordeals—small and great, common and extraordinary—which are not strange to the believers but rather are God's merciful dealings carried out in His righteousness and holiness according to our need (1 Pet. 4:12). That the gracious dispensing of the processed and consummated Triune God, in His economy, into the believers must be accompanied by His righteous dealings is excellently set forth in 1 Peter. God's governmental dealings are found in the believers' being made sorrowful by various trials (1:6), passing through the proving of their faith as if through fire (v. 7), being spoken against as evildoers and reviled (2:12; 3:16), bearing sorrows by suffering unjustly, to which we were called (2:19-21), suffering because of righteousness (3:14), suffering for doing good (v. 17), suffering in the flesh to be delivered from sin and a vain manner of life (4:1; 1:18), suffering fiery ordeals, which are not strange but common to the believers (4:12), being slandered for not running together with the Gentiles (v. 4), and being reproached in the name of Christ and suffering as a Christian according to the will of God, which sufferings are being accomplished among our brotherhood in the world for a "little while," that is, for the duration of our life in the flesh (vv. 14-16, 19; 5:9-10). Such suffering is God's discipline in His governmental dealing, which begins from the house of God. To undergo such suffering is to be judged, dealt with, and disciplined in the flesh by God, the loving Father who disciplines His children for the highest purpose (Heb. 12:5-10). In all these things the believers share in the sufferings of Christ as the model (1 Pet. 4:13; 2:21), who lived a human life that was absolutely under the government of God. Hence, we should arm ourselves with a sober mind, the mind of Christ (4:1), to endure such suffering.

The early teacher Irenaeus said, "Tribulation is necessary for those who are saved" for the purpose of their purification and to be "fitted for the royal banquet"

(557). As a result of the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity in His economy, along with the believers' agreement and cooperation with God's various dealings, we are tried and proven in our faith (1:7), receive the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls (v. 9), are made holy in all our manner of life to have a life that expresses the holy nature of God (vv. 15-16), are governed by a holy, healthy fear of God (v. 17), are purified in our souls (v. 22), grow in the divine life unto full salvation (2:2), are built up as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood (v. 5), live an excellent manner of life, a life beautiful in its virtues, and a good manner of life, a life for God and filled and saturated with God (v. 12; 3:16), live in the consciousness of and intimate fellowship with God (2:19), live to righteousness (v. 24), live and walk in the spirit according to God (4:6), are blessed, having the Spirit of glory and of God resting upon us (3:14; 4:14), become armed with a mind against the flesh (v. 1), become reproductions of Christ to follow in His steps (2:21), share in the sufferings of Christ (4:13), become witnesses of the sufferings of Christ (5:1), are perfected, established, strengthened, and grounded through sufferings (v. 10), receive multiplied grace and peace through our sufferings, limitations, and weaknesses (1:2), receive grace under the humbling hand of God (5:5-6), enjoy the grace of life, varied grace, and all grace (3:7; 4:10; 5:10), grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Pet. 3:18), receive consummated grace at the revelation, the coming, of Christ (1 Pet. 1:13), rejoice exultingly at the revelation of Christ's glory (4:13), and have all the hindrances to the growth and development of the divine life within us removed, issuing in the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and a rich entrance into His eternal kingdom (2 Pet. 1:5-9, 11). Because the believers are under God's governmental dealings for such a positive purpose, we may borrow from Peter's excellent use of adjectives to speak of the judgment of God as "precious" (1 Pet. 1:7, 19; 2:4, 6; 2 Pet. 1:1, 4). Anything and everything that happens to the believers, whether persecution or any other kind of suffering, is a part of God's precious governmental dealing to bring the believers into the full enjoyment of and participation in God's economy.

Governmental Forgiveness

The purpose, principle, and nature of God's governmental dealings with the believers are made very clear by Watchman Nee's insightful chapter entitled "Governmental Forgiveness" (669-689). Nee writes,

I have often thought that if a person were made aware of God's government immediately upon becoming a Christian, he would spare himself many troubles and problems...Many problems develop because men are ignorant of God's government. I hope that God's children will know His government from the first day, the first

year, of their Christian life. If they do, they will be able to go on in a very proper way. (674, 689)

In his chapter Nee relates God's governmental dealings to a believer's sins, failures, and shortcomings and explains the nature of the believer's eventual release from God's discipline. First, he identifies four kinds of forgiveness. The first and most commonly understood is eternal forgiveness (Luke 24:47; Rom. 4:7), in which, upon our believing in Christ, all our sins are removed, leaving no trace of them forever before God. All believers have received this forgiveness, and it is the cause of our eternal salvation. The second kind of forgiveness is instrumental forgiveness, in which the church confirms and testifies of God's forgiveness or retention of sins (John 20:22-23). The third is forgiveness in fellowship. First John 1:7 and 9 say,

If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin...If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

As we walk in the light, sins we have committed after being saved are revealed to us, and our confession along with God's faithful forgiveness continuously restores us to fellowship with God and with others.

The fourth kind of forgiveness is governmental forgiveness, the understanding of which sheds much light on our experience as believers under the government of God. Forgiveness under the government of God relates to the consequences of sins, failures, and shortcomings and God's way of disciplining the needful believer. Perhaps many Christians do not prefer to think that even forgiven sins can have consequences. Nevertheless, this is the nature of God's governmental way of dealing with His sons. Darby says,

God is always governing in providence now. "The hairs of your head are all numbered." But do we not see a righteous person often put into the greatest trouble?...For us now, "the Father judgeth every man's work." He has, no doubt, committed all judgment to the Son; but yet He chastens His children; Heb 12. Christ says, "If any man will serve me, him will my Father honour." "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father," etc. This refers to the consequences of the child's conduct. It is the Father's government of His children; it is the Father's care watching over His children for their good, and is not like the government of the world in providence. (*Writings* 27:142)

Darby speaks well concerning the "consequences of the child's conduct." After a believer sins, is enlightened, confesses, and is spontaneously forgiven, his once broken fellowship with God is restored. His sins are forgotten and put away (Heb. 8:12; 10:17), and his enjoyment of God and his common, spiritual pursuit with the believers is once again unhindered. However, as a consequence of the sin, God in His wisdom may eventually change His way of dealing with him. Nee illustrates this with a father who allows his sons to play for two hours before supper. One day during the play time the sons fight with other children, but when they return home, they confess, and the father forgives them. The next day, however, this happens again. Again they confess, the father forgives them, and the fellowship between the father and sons is restored. In consequence, however, the father will change his way of dealing with his sons, and he will forbid them from going outside. This is the father's governmental dealing with his sons. Only when he is satisfied that his sons will no longer cause trouble will he begin to release them, first for ten minutes, later for half an hour, and eventually for longer periods. This is the father's governmental forgiveness.

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God deals with His children according to the same principle. "We cannot guarantee that God will always treat us the same way as before. At a certain point, God may change His way with us" (Nee 682). Fellowship is easily restored

for those who confess with a true heart, but God's way of dealing with a shortcoming believer may change. His dispensational discipline may be exercised upon him, to be withdrawn only after a certain period of restriction or even suffering. "Governmental forgiveness is absolutely different from eternal forgiveness, instrumental forgiveness, and forgiveness in fellowship. Governmental forgiveness is related to the way God manages, rules over, and deals with us" (676). This is according to the principle of Galatians 6:7, which says, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." To be sure, a saved one who sows to his flesh will not reap in like kind in terms of eternal forgiveness; this is a gift of grace. He may, however, reap a dispensational dealing prepared according to God's righteous judgment in order to receive governmental forgiveness. This is a faithful word, the word of righteousness in the New Testament.

Cases of Forgiveness under God's Government

In Matthew 9:2 the Lord Jesus said to the paralytic, "Take courage, child; your sins are forgiven." According to the

context, the Lord spoke this word in view not of the man's eternal salvation but of his healing. This indicates that the paralytic was sick because of his sins. Henry Alford suggests that by means of this sickness the paralytic's guilt and feeling of sinfulness was aroused in him, and he "recognized the misery of his disease as the punishment of his sins" (88). Therefore, the Lord's forgiveness here relates not to eternal life but to the man's healing, enabling him to rise, take up his bed, and go to his house. This forgiveness is governmental. Similarly, James 5:14-15 says,

Is anyone among you ill? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him.

The committing of sins is often the cause of illness (John 5:14). Paul tells us that one who partakes of the Lord's supper without properly discerning the Lord's body eats and drinks judgment to himself. Because of this, he says, "Many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep" (1 Cor. 11:30). Thus, this kind of weakness and sickness (and in the extreme case, premature death) are the Lord's judgment and discipline (vv. 27-32). In such cases governmental forgiveness is the cause of healing. In James 5:14-15, the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick. To be saved here is not to receive initial salvation, because the sick one is already "among you," that is, in the church. Rather, this kind of prayer brings in God's governmental forgiveness, resulting in healing. To call the elders of the church to pray regarding an illness implies first that there is no problem between the calling one and the church, represented by the elders. It also implies that a normal relationship has been restored between the calling one and the church, if the illness is due to the calling one's having offended the church. Third, it implies that the sick one and the elders have thoroughly confessed to one another their sins, clearing away all barriers to the restoration of the sick one (Recovery Version, v. 14, note 2). Again we must emphasize that this kind of forgiveness relates not mainly to fellowship but to sickness as a result of sin. The cases in 1 Corinthians 11 and James 5 prove that forgiveness of sins for the healing of sickness is a matter of God's government.

The judgment pronounced by Nathan upon David in 2 Samuel 12 is another example of God's governmental dealings. After David sinned by sending Uriah to his death and taking Bathsheba as his wife, Nathan was sent by Jehovah to declare,

The sword will not depart from your house forever because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says Jehovah,

I will now raise up trouble against you from within your house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and will give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did this secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and even before the sun. (vv. 10-12)

In Psalm 51 David repented and confessed his sins to God. David called upon Jehovah to blot out his transgressions, wash him thoroughly from his iniquity, cleanse him from his sin, and purge his sin (vv. 1-2, 7, 9). This indicates that David's repentance and confession were thorough and that his asking for forgiveness was genuine. In 2 Samuel 12:13 David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against Jehovah." Here also, by his simple words (cf. Luke 18:13), David demonstrated a thoroughly broken spirit, acknowledging his guilt "openly, candidly, and without prevarication" (Keil 391). Nathan's reply—"Jehovah has also put away your sin; you will not die"—indicates that in the principle of 1 John 1:9 David's sin was forgiven, and he was cleansed from all unrighteousness. However, Nathan continued by saying, "Nevertheless."² *Nevertheless* is the word of God's government: "Nevertheless, because you have given the enemies of Jehovah much occasion to blaspheme Him because of this thing, the son who is born to you shall also surely die" (2 Sam. 12:14). As we know, all these things came to pass as God's governmental judgment upon David. This proves that sins may be forgiven quickly, but the discipline of God's government may still remain. David quickly restored his fellowship with God, but God's discipline continued to be with David and even with his descendants after his death.

David prayed in penitence for the life of his son, but when he discovered that the child had died, he washed himself, changed his clothes, ceased to mourn, and went to the house of Jehovah to worship (vv. 18-23). "When the child was dead, he humbled himself under the mighty hand of God, and rested satisfied with His grace, without giving himself up to fruitless pain" (Keil 393). Even though God forgives our sins, we may not be able to prevent His chastisement and governmental hand from coming upon us. To the forgiven and cleansed one, for his own spiritual progress, God may still say, "I will now raise up trouble against you" (v. 11). The result of God's dealing with His people through troubles is, in New Testament terms, their sanctification and transformation for their full enjoyment of the Triune God today and their rich entrance into the kingdom in the coming millennial age.

Nee concludes, "God's children must be careful not to provoke His governmental hand. It is not easy for God to remove His hand once it is provoked" (676). First Peter 5:6 says, "Therefore be humbled under the mighty hand of

God that He may exalt you in due time.” Once He stretches forth His governmental hand, we can do nothing except humble ourselves under it. The more we humble ourselves under God’s mighty hand and give up all resistance, the easier it is for Him to lift His hand. To be submissive to God’s hand, to be willing to be made lowly, is to take the God-honoring way that gives Him the ground to exalt us in His time. If we truly humble ourselves under His hand, He will relieve and release us “in due time.” To be released in this way is to be forgiven governmentally.

It is only in the light of God’s government and governmental forgiveness that many passages of the New Testament can be properly understood. Since eternal salvation is based on the Father’s judgment of Christ so that His righteousness is imputed to us through faith, how can it still be that the Father judges according to each one’s work (Rom. 5:18-19; 1 Pet. 1:17)? How can the forgiveness of our heavenly Father be contingent upon our forgiving of others and the mercy we show to them even as they suffer under God’s hand (Matt. 6:14-15; 18:21-35; James 2:13)? How is it that the Lord at His second coming will render to each one as his work is, not as his faith is (Rev. 22:12; 1 Cor. 3:12-15)? Without the understanding of the principles of God’s government, we have no way to deal with many such questions raised in our study of the Bible. This again is the word of righteousness, which answers many questions and solves many problems in the understanding of the divine revelation.

Our Living Hope and Inheritance of Life

First Peter 1:3-5 says,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, kept in the heavens for you, who are being guarded by the power of God through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time.

In verse 9 Peter continues, “Receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” Peter’s writings are full of wisdom, insight, experience, and personal appreciation. In verses 3 through 9, which are one sentence, he speaks of a living hope, an inheritance, a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time, and the salvation of our souls. *A living hope* and *an inheritance* are in apposition, and the salvation ready to be revealed is the salvation of

our souls. Our living hope is a hope not of objective things but of the eternal life with all the endless divine blessings. The believers experience and enjoy the eternal life in three distinct ages, or dispensations—the present age, which is the church age; the coming age, the age of the millennial kingdom; and the eternal age in the New Jerusalem in the new heavens and new earth. The divine life enables us to have a hope, with numerous aspects, in each of these ages.

In this age we have the hope of growing in life, of maturing, of manifesting our gifts, of exercising our functions, of being transformed, of overcoming, of being redeemed in our body, and of entering into glory. In the coming age we have the hope of entering into the kingdom, of reigning with the Lord, and of enjoying the blessings of the eternal life in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. In eternity we have the hope of being in the New Jerusalem, where we will participate fully in the consummated blessings of the eternal life in its ultimate manifestation in eternity. (Recovery Version, v. 3, note 6)

The eternal life within us provides us with this hope!

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Thus, it is a living hope, a hope of life, with the blessings of life. The blessings of the eternal life in the eternal age, in the New Jerusalem, will be the common portion of all of God’s saved ones; this fact is unconditional, assured, and immutable.

However, the believers’ practical enjoyment of the hope of life and inheritance of the blessings of life are conditional in the two temporal ages—the church age and the kingdom age. The conditional enjoyment of the divine life in the present age is illustrated in Romans 8. Verse 6 says, “The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace,” and verse 13 continues, “If you live according to the flesh, you must die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the practices of the body, you will live.” *Must die* (μέλλετε ἀποθνήσκειν) denotes that “those things which we infer from certain preceding events will of necessity follow” in a cause and effect relationship (Thayer 397). For believers, the “brothers” (v. 12), to die spiritually is a consequence of their setting their mind on the flesh and living according to the flesh. To be sure, to have the sense of death in verse 6 and to die spiritually in verse 13 are to not enjoy the eternal life we received through regeneration. This shows us that the practical participation in and enjoyment of the blessings of eternal life, according to our living hope, are not unconditional entitlements to all believers at all times. Rather, they are conditioned on our exercise to coordinate with the Spirit who indwells us (v. 11). Thus, in Peter’s writings, the living hope of the

believers is activated, maintained, and realized through their cooperation with the Spirit under the government of God.

If the blessings and hope of eternal life are maintained through exercise, so then is the enjoyment of our inheritance (1 Pet. 1:4) in this age and in the kingdom age to come. The inheritance spoken of here comprises the coming salvation of our souls (vv. 5, 9), the grace to be received at the revelation of the Lord (v. 13), the glory to be revealed (5:1), and the unfading crown of glory (v. 4). All these will come in full to the overcoming believers at the coming of the Lord in consequence of their exercise, cooperation with the Lord, and pursuit of the divine life today. Without such an exercise, the inheritance of the blessings of eternal life will be frustrated, the enjoyment of the living hope will be suspended, and the entrance into the kingdom in practicality will be delayed.

Salvation in the Epistles of Peter

Salvation, as dealt with in the Epistles of Peter, is the salvation of our tripartite being, particularly of our souls. It is a salvation that is enjoyed in part today but will not be manifested in full until the coming of the Lord. Moreover, its fullness and completion at Christ's coming and in the kingdom age will be enjoyed as a reward only by the diligent, tested, and proven believers and, as such, will not be the common portion of all saved ones. First Peter 1:7-9 says,

So that the proving of your faith, much more precious than of gold which perishes though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; whom having not seen, you love; into whom though not seeing Him at present, yet believing, you exult with joy that is unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

According to grammar, *receiving* in verse 9 continues verse 8, but according to fact, it is connected with verse 7. The proving of our faith results in the receiving of the end of our faith, that is, the salvation of our souls. Man is of three parts: spirit, soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23; Heb. 4:12). Our spirit was saved through regeneration (John 3:6); our body will be saved, redeemed, through the coming transfiguration (Phil. 3:21; Rom. 8:23); and at the revelation of the Lord, His coming back, our soul will be saved from sufferings into the full enjoyment of the Lord.

First Peter 1:5 speaks of the salvation ready to be revealed at the last time. In one aspect, our salvation transpired in the past when we first believed into Christ. This initial stage of our salvation, the stage of regeneration, is composed of redemption, positional sanctification,

justification, reconciliation, and regeneration (Recovery Version, v. 5, note 5). In this stage God justified us through the redemption of Christ (Rom. 3:24-26) and regenerated us in our spirit with His life by His Spirit (John 3:3-6). Thus we received God's eternal salvation and His eternal life and became His children, who shall not perish forever (Heb. 5:9; John 3:15; 1:12-13; 10:28-29). This salvation has saved us from God's condemnation and from eternal perdition.

However, this is only the initial aspect of our salvation, and for the most part it is not the salvation spoken of by Peter. Peter's concern, in the burden and portion given to him by God, is with the salvation yet to come. God's full and complete salvation has a long span, from regeneration to glorification. The salvation that Peter deals with is primarily that which will come to the tested and proven believers at a future time; it is a salvation ready to be revealed "at the last time" (1 Pet. 1:5). *At the last time* clearly does not relate to our initial salvation, which was brought to us in the past, at the time we believed. Likewise, the salvation of our souls in verses 9 and 10 is the issue of the proving of our faith, which will be found unto praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ, that is, at His coming, which will transpire at the end of this age. In 2:2 Peter says that through our partaking of the milk of the word of God we grow unto salvation. To be sure, no growth in life is required for our initial receiving of life. Rather, having received the divine life through regeneration, we now need to grow in this life and with this life by being nourished with the milk conveyed in the word of God. This growth results in our full salvation, our maturity in the divine life, which will be revealed at the last time and found unto praise at the coming of Christ. Such a salvation is ongoing and progressing.

Peter also speaks of the salvation that results from the long-suffering of the Lord, during which period the believers must be diligent to be found in peace, without spot and without blemish (2 Pet. 3:14-15). Again, a salvation received through diligence cannot be our initial salvation in the stage of regeneration. Instead, the Lord's long-suffering in the delay regarding His promise should be counted as a prolonged opportunity for the believers to have a practical, continual repentance in order to receive the salvation of their souls at the revelation of Jesus Christ. This will be the topmost portion of God's full salvation, which will be enjoyed by His diligent and faithful ones. This is the salvation dealt with by Peter, a salvation that requires our cooperation with the Lord's operation in His economy and under His government. Church history and practical experience tell us that not all believers respond to the Lord's operation in an equally diligent and faithful way. Therefore, the full enjoyment of the salvation to be revealed at the Lord's coming will

be the portion of the overcomers, not of all believers. For this reason, we should pass the time of our sojourning in fear (1 Pet. 1:17), be on guard lest we fall from our own steadfastness, and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:17-18).

The Salvation of Our Souls

After the initial stage of salvation, we enter into the progressing stage, the stage of transformation, which is composed of freedom from sin, dispositional sanctification, growth in life, transformation, building up, and maturing. In this stage God is freeing us from the dominion of indwelling sin—the law of sin and of death—by the law of the Spirit of life, through the subjective working of the effectiveness of the death of Christ in us (Rom. 6:6-7; 8:2). He is also sanctifying us by His Holy Spirit with His holy nature through His discipline and His judgment in His own house (15:16; Heb. 12:10; 1 Pet. 4:17). He is causing us to grow in His life (1 Cor. 3:6-7) and is transforming us by renewing the inward parts of our soul by the life-giving Spirit through the working of all things (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; Eph. 4:23; Rom. 8:28). God is also building us together into a spiritual house for His own dwelling (1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:22) and maturing us, ripening us, in His life for the completion of His full salvation (4:13; Col. 1:28; Rev. 14:15). In this way we are being delivered from the power of sin, the world, the flesh, self, the natural life of the soul, and individualism into maturity in the divine life for the fulfillment of God's purpose.

The final stage of our salvation, the completing stage, the stage of glorification, is composed of the redemption (transfiguration) of our body, conformity to the Lord, glorification, the inheritance of God's kingdom, participation in Christ's kingship, and the topmost enjoyment of the Lord (Phil. 3:21; Rom. 8:23, 29-30; 2 Tim. 4:18; 2 Pet. 1:11; James 2:5; Rev. 20:4, 6; Matt. 25:21, 23). In this way our body will be freed from the slavery of corruption of the old creation into the freedom of the glory of God's new creation (Rom. 8:21), and our soul will be delivered out of the realm of trials and sufferings into a new realm, one that is full of glory (1 Pet. 4:13), and will share in and enjoy all that the Triune God is, has, and has accomplished, attained, and obtained.

According to the Epistles of Peter, the salvation of our souls is worked out in us by a coordination of a twofold operation: the energetic operation of the Triune God to dispense Himself into us according to His economy

(1 Pet. 1:2-3) and the wise and measured operation of God in His government to discipline us through sufferings (vv. 6-7). As a result of God's dealing with His erring children by the practical application of the cross of Christ, their souls are judged, subdued, and transformed unto a fuller knowledge of God. Darby says,

While the government of God maintains its own principles and respects not persons, and meets His children in an erring path and overthrows them, it maintains His way and overthrows them if they cross it. But then with the saint He goes through this—much deeper into the soul. He does not merely correct the way, but lets His mind in as to the spirit that led to it. The will is broken—we find what we are—the soul, which had gone its own way, finds itself again with God, though sorrowfully, and God is known—the state of the soul is changed, it is not the free exercise of will, but the siftings and subduedness of a soul that has to say to God, and the happiness that accompanies it, though this last way be regained through trial. If there be any motive which has led astray, or any evil, and not merely levity and estrangement of heart from God, any false confidence in the soul, it is judged, of

course...The walk becomes more thoroughly a following of Jesus under the effect of the Cross. This is ever true and simple, deeper and more experimental. (Notes 306)

THE SALVATION OF OUR SOULS IS WORKED OUT BY THE ENERGETIC OPERATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD TO DISPENSE HIMSELF INTO US AND THE WISE AND MEASURED OPERATION OF GOD TO DISCIPLINE US THROUGH SUFFERINGS.

The full and completed salvation is the salvation of our souls, the salvation that is ready to be revealed to us at the last time, the grace to be brought to us at the revelation of Christ in glory. To obtain such a salvation requires that we deny our soul, our soulish life, with all its pleasures in this age, that we may gain it in the enjoyment of the Lord in the coming age (Matt. 16:24-27; Luke 17:30-33; John 12:25). Matthew 10:39 says, "He who finds his soul-life shall lose it, and he who loses his soul-life for My sake shall find it." To find the soul-life is to allow the soul to have its enjoyment and to escape suffering in this age. To lose the soul-life is to cause the soul to lose its enjoyment and thereby to suffer. If we allow our soul to have its enjoyment in this age, we will cause our soul to suffer the loss of its enjoyment in the coming kingdom age. However, if we allow our soul to suffer the loss of its enjoyment in this age for the Lord's sake, we will enable it to have its enjoyment in the coming kingdom age by sharing the Lord's joy in ruling over the earth. Thus, the denial of the soul-life and of its enjoyment in the present age is a consistent thought in Peter's writings, underlying his encouragement and exhortations to the suffering believers. It is the characteristic of the exercised believer who submits to the Lord's governmental dealings and is humbled under the mighty hand of

God so that his faith, having thus been proved, may be found unto praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Such a faithful believer will realize and apprehend the hope of life and will lay hold of the inheritance of life, both in this age as his portion and in the coming age in a fuller way as his reward. In this way he will receive the full salvation of his soul.

Saved Only with Difficulty

First Peter 4:18 says, “If the righteous man is saved only with difficulty, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?” The sense of *with difficulty* (μόλις, from μόλος, “toil”) is illustrated in Acts 27, where the word is used three times to describe the difficulty of maneuvering a ship in tempestuous winds (vv. 7-8, 16). Thus, *saved only with difficulty* denotes a salvation through difficult toil. If the salvation of the righteous in this verse refers to eternal salvation, we have a significant obstacle in understanding Peter’s meaning, needless to say a soteriological contradiction. Since our salvation from God’s condemnation is based upon Christ’s death on the cross, it is not a difficult thing for God to apply it to a repenting sinner, nor is it difficult for the sinner to appropriate it by a simple act of faith. For this reason, many have found this passage difficult to adequately exposit. Charles Finney taught that the difficulty of salvation lies in the fact that fallen, damaged, and wrongly-educated men are ill-suited to choose to be saved. He says,

The Bible nowhere raises the question as to the entire sufficiency of the atonement to do all that an atonement can do or need do for the salvation of our race...The great difficulty is to *persuade sinners to choose right*. God is infinitely ready to forgive them if they will repent; but the great problem is to persuade them to do so...The darkness of nature is so great and so gross, that it must be an exceedingly great work to save them from its influence, and pour the true light of God through their intelligence. (132-133, 139)

Finney’s interpretation suits his evangelistic viewpoint (as well as expressing his departure from conservative Calvinism), but it is not in the spirit of Peter’s writings and of verses 12 to 19 of 1 Peter 4 in particular. Darby speaks more clearly, treating this passage in the light of God’s government, which is Peter’s concern. His New Translation renders “saved only with difficulty” as “difficultly saved.” His note on verse 18 adds, “Saved here on the earth, as through the trials and judgments which specially beset the Jewish Christians” (1473). In his chapter, “The Government of God,” he says further,

The government of God, however imperfectly manifested outwardly, is yet exercised at any rate as to His children, and is in result with the world.³ It is exercised

according to His judgment of what is right and what is wrong. He makes good His righteousness in government...Through this, when His saints err from Him, they must go; He maintains His true character. Hence they are difficultly saved. (*Notes* 306)

Kenneth S. Wuest also recognizes the government of God in verse 18. He writes,

The context in First Peter speaks of the persecutions which were allowed to come by God as a disciplinary judgment, the purpose of which was to purify their lives. They were being saved with difficulty in the sense that if it was necessary for God to purify the lives of *saints* by these drastic means, namely, persecution and suffering, what can one say as to the position of the *unsaved* in relation to God? If the righteous need disciplinary judgments, how much more will the unrighteous merit the wrath of God whose offer of righteousness they have rejected. (122-123)

Saved only with difficulty is another phrase in the Bible that can be understood only in the light of God’s government. The ones being saved are the “saints,” as Darby and Wuest refer to them, the believers who have already received initial salvation and have entered into the lifelong stage of the salvation of their souls. To be saved with difficulty is to be saved through God’s dispensational discipline, His disciplinary judgment, from the coming destruction (1 Thes. 5:3, 8). The believer, who is disciplined by God through various sufferings that his life may be purified, will be saved through the difficulty of these sufferings from the destruction of God’s wrath toward the world.⁴ If we are faithful to the grace of God’s dispensing and to the full course of the proving of our faith, which is measured out to us by the God of measure (2 Cor. 10:13), our soul will be saved from sufferings into the full enjoyment of the Lord at His appearing.

The Development of the Divine Life unto Maturity

Second Peter 1 is a highlight of Peter’s writings and is perhaps the most illustrative practical definition in the New Testament of the growth of the divine life unto maturity in the believers, revealing not only Peter’s rich understanding but his own maturity in life near the end of his course (v. 14). Verse 1 speaks of the equally precious faith that has been allotted to us by God through the word of God’s New Testament economy and the impartation of the Spirit, and verse 2 is Peter’s blessing to his readers for the multiplication of the grace and peace that came to us through the God-allotted faith, in the full knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. Verse 3 continues, “Seeing that His divine power has granted to us all things which relate to life and godliness, through the full knowledge of Him who has called us by His own

glory and virtue.” All things which relate to life and godliness—the various aspects of the divine life—have been imparted to us, infused into us, by the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, who has regenerated us and who indwells us. This is the divine provision and supply for the believers as they sojourn under God’s government. The divine life is the inward energy, inward strength, to bring forth the outward godliness, which leads to glory and results in glory. Virtue here is the excellent attributes of God becoming to us the energy of life, and glory is godliness becoming the full expression of the Triune God (Lee, *Second Peter* 14-17).

Following this, verse 4 says, “Through which He has granted to us precious and exceedingly great promises that through these you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world by lust.” This is Peter’s mature understanding and his unique utterance concerning the believers’ relationship with and participation in Christ. We, the believers in Christ, have become partakers of the divine nature in an organic union with the Triune God. The divine nature refers to what God is, that is, the riches, the elements, and the constituents of God’s being (John 4:24; 1 John 1:5; 4:8, 16). It is the substance of the divine life and is within the divine life. A partaker is an enjoyer; as partakers of the divine nature, we are enjoyers of the Divine Being, enjoying what God is. Through this partaking by enjoying the riches of God’s being, we will be constituted with the divine nature, becoming the same as God in life and nature—but not in His deity, His Godhead—to express Him in all that we are and do (Kangas 266-272). “Precious truth! Privilege so exalted! and which renders us capable of enjoying God Himself, as well as all good” (Darby, *Synopsis* 408).

As we partake of the divine nature, enjoying all that God is, the riches of the divine life will be fully developed, as described in 2 Peter 1:5-7. These verses say,

For this very reason also, adding all diligence, supply bountifully in your faith virtue; and in virtue, knowledge; and in knowledge, self-control; and in self-control, endurance; and in endurance, godliness; and in godliness, brotherly love; and in brotherly love, love.

To add all diligence (σπουδὴν πᾶσαν παρεισενέγκαντες) is to “interest one’s self most earnestly” in accomplishing, promoting, or striving after something, bringing in such diligence besides, along with, something else (Thayer 585, 487). *Supply bountifully* (ἐπιχορηγήσατε) is an

intensified verb form of χορηγός, referring to a wealthy benefactor who would spend extravagantly to procure and supply all things necessary to fit out a large chorus. Hence, to supply bountifully is to contribute extravagantly for the development of the virtues of the divine nature (Charles 148; Thayer 670). Besides the precious and exceedingly great promises given to us by God, we should bring in all diligence to cooperate with the enabling of the dynamic divine nature to supply bountifully, to develop, the equally precious faith which we have all received. Faith here may be considered as a seed that is sown into us through the living and abiding word of God (1 Pet. 1:23) at the time of our regeneration, as the common portion of the New Testament blessing of life for the initiation of the Christian life. This faith needs to be exercised so that the virtues of the divine life may be developed in the steps portrayed in verses 5 to 7 of 2 Peter 1 and reach maturity. As we will see, the development of these virtues constitutes our real and practical entrance into the kingdom of God.

In the exercise of this faith, we develop virtue, the energy of the divine life which issues in vigorous action. In turn,

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PURIFIED THROUGH VARIOUS SUFFERINGS,
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virtue needs the bountiful supply of the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, regarding all things that relate to the divine life and nature. Self-control is the exercise of control and restraint over one’s self in its passions, desires, and habits. We must exercise

self-control in our knowledge for the proper growth of life. Then in our self-control we need to develop endurance to bear with others and with our circumstances, and in our endurance we need to develop godliness, a living that is like God and expresses God. In godliness we develop brotherly love (φιλαδελφία), a brotherly affection, a love characterized by love and pleasure. Finally, the ultimate development of the divine nature within us is the nobler and higher love (ἀγάπη), the divine love, which is God Himself in His nature (1 John 4:8, 16). If faith is the seed implanted within us, virtue and knowledge may be considered as roots that grow out of the seed, self-control as the trunk, endurance and godliness as the branches, brotherly love as the blossoms, and the divine love as the fruit. By the development of these virtues, we grow in the life of Christ; that is, we “grow up into Him in all things” and grow “with the growth of God,” the increase of the element of God (Eph. 4:13-15; Col. 2:19). Eventually we will reach maturity, be full of Christ, and be qualified and equipped to be kings in the coming kingdom (2 Pet. 1:11). This full development unto maturity requires our earnest diligence and cooperation with the dynamic divine nature within us.

A Rich Entrance into the Kingdom

In verse 8 Peter adds, “For these things, existing in you and abounding, constitute you neither idle nor unfruitful unto the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” All the above virtues become the possession of the believers and exist in them forever through their experience of partaking of the divine nature in all its riches, abounding and multiplying in them in the development and growth of the divine life unto its maturity. Verses 10 and 11 continue,

Therefore, brothers, be the more diligent to make your calling and selection firm, for doing these things you shall by no means ever stumble. For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly and bountifully supplied to you.

The bountiful supply that we enjoy in the development of the divine life and nature will bountifully supply us a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom. It will enable and qualify us to enter into the coming kingdom with all the riches of the divine life and divine nature as our excellent virtues unto the splendid glory of God.

The entrance into the kingdom can be best understood if we consider the two senses of the kingdom as revealed in the New Testament (Kangas 265-266). On the one hand, the eternal kingdom is the realm of the divine rule, which was given by God to Christ. Daniel 7:13-14 says,

I watched in the night visions, / And there with the clouds of heaven / One like a Son of Man was coming; / And He came to the Ancient of Days, / And they brought Him near before Him. / And to Him was given dominion, glory, and a kingdom, / That all the peoples, nations, and languages might serve Him. / His dominion is an eternal dominion, which will not pass away; / And His kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.

In His ascension Christ as the Son of Man appeared before the throne of God to receive dominion and a kingdom. After receiving the kingdom from God, He will come back to rule over the entire world (Luke 19:12, 15; Rev. 11:15). This is mostly the dispensational, administrative side of the kingdom.

In Matthew 13, however, the initiation of the kingdom is compared to a seed sown into a field and growing. Verses 3 to 8 say,

Behold, the sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the way, and the birds came and devoured them. And others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much earth, and immediately they sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and because they

had no root, they withered. And others fell on the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them. But others fell on the good earth and yielded fruit, one a hundredfold, and one sixtyfold, and one thirtyfold.

The seed is the word of the kingdom as a living, viable, organic entity that is sown into the believers (v. 19). The seed of life, which is the Lord Himself as life, grows in the hearts of those who receive Him, yet His growth is according to the condition of each one’s heart as the human soil. Some are shallow in receiving the word of the kingdom, and within them are the “rocks” of hidden sins, personal desires, self-seeking, and self-pity, which hinder the seed from taking root in the depths of the heart (vv. 20-21). Others frustrate the growth of the seed with “thorns,” the anxiety of the age and the deceitfulness of riches, which utterly choke the word, preventing it from growing in the heart and causing it to become unfruitful (v. 22). The good earth, however, signifies the good heart that is not hardened by worldly traffic, that is without hidden sins, and that is without the anxiety of the age and the deceitfulness of riches. Such a heart gives every inch of its ground to receive the word that the word may grow and bear fruit (Recovery Version, Matt. 13:5-8, notes). This organic sense of the kingdom as a living, growing entity is repeated in Mark 4:26-29, which says,

So is the kingdom of God: as if a man cast seed on the earth, and sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and lengthens—how, he does not know. The earth bears fruit by itself: first a blade, then an ear, then full grain in the ear. But when the fruit is ripe, immediately he sends forth the sickle, because the harvest has come.

The above passages make clear that the kingdom of God is the growth of the divine seed, the divine life and nature ministered through God’s word, becoming a realm in which He can rule and carry out His administration. It is the organic aspect of the kingdom that is emphasized in 2 Peter 1—the growth of the seed of faith through the roots of virtue and knowledge, the trunk of self-control, the branches of endurance and godliness, and the blossom and fruit of brotherly love and love. This organic growth is the growth of Christ Himself as the divine life with the divine nature, through our diligent cooperation with Him (vv. 5, 10).

Just as the animal kingdom is the totality of all the animal lives, and the plant kingdom of the many plant lives, the kingdom of God, in its organic sense, is the realm of God Himself as the divine life. Prior to the operation of God’s salvation in the regeneration of many sons (1 Pet. 1:3), only God comprised the kingdom of God as a realm of life. In this sense, the kingdom of God is God Himself. However, when we became “children of God...begotten...of God,” we entered into His kingdom,

and in organic terms the kingdom expanded to include us (John 1:12-13; 3:5). Now all the believers are in the kingdom of God, that is, in God Himself as the kingdom, the realm of the divine life. The understanding of not only the dispensational, administrative aspect of the kingdom but also its organic aspect is crucial to interpreting many passages concerning the kingdom in the New Testament.

With this view, we can see the issue and consequence of the condition of a believer's heart and his diligence in pursuing the divine life for its full growth unto maturity. In the organic sense, we may say that we are in the kingdom only to a certain degree. Although this may sound strange to some, it is the inevitable way to interpret the first parable of the kingdom in Matthew 13. To be sure, the shallow believer, the ensnared believer, and the good-hearted believer (vv. 20-23) afford different depths and breadths of their heart for the growth of the divine seed, and as a result, the kingdom is developed within them in differing degrees. Because of this, we may speak of entrance into the kingdom in part and in full.

This is also the way to interpret 2 Peter 1:5-11. It is by the growth and development of the divine nature that "the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly and bountifully supplied to you" (v. 11). The birth of the divine life with-

in us was our entrance into the kingdom in this age, but the growth, development, and maturity of the divine life will be our entrance into the kingdom in the coming age. This distinction between birth and development is crucial. Not everyone who is born into the kingdom of God by regeneration with the divine life will enter into the kingdom of God as the eternal kingdom during the millennium.⁵ The entrance into this aspect of the kingdom requires the maturity of the divine life. Those who live in God as the kingdom and experience the growth and development of the divine life will be richly and bountifully supplied an entrance into the eternal kingdom. This entrance will be a reward to those who pursue the growth in life unto maturity and the development of the virtues of the divine nature so that they may participate, in the millennium, in the kingship of Christ in God's glory (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4, 6; Lee, *Second Peter* 55-56).

To organically and spontaneously enter into the kingdom as the fullness of the growth of Christ Himself within us is equivalent to receiving the inheritance of life, according to the hope of life, in the coming age (1 Pet. 1:3-4). In the New Testament, to inherit the kingdom in the coming age

is conditional and, as such, is considered a reward, in addition to salvation, to the overcoming believers (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; Matt. 5:20), which we can obtain only by growing to maturity in the proper development of the divine life. This should be an incentive for us to live a life of "adding all diligence" and being "the more diligent" to cooperate with the Lord for the growth of the divine seed within us. By living this kind of life, we shall be qualified to inherit the coming kingdom.

The Coming Judgment and the Proving of Our Faith

God has regenerated us unto a living hope—the hope of the divine life—unto the inheritance of life, which will be the fulfillment of our hope and the full possession of the promise of life. As we have seen, this inheritance comprises the coming salvation of our souls (1 Pet. 1:5, 9), the grace to be received at the revelation of the Lord (v. 13), the glory to be revealed (5:1), and the unfading crown of glory (v. 4). In order to bring us into all these blessings of the divine life, God is operating on the believers in two marvelous ways. First, He is dispensing Himself into us, in His divine Trinity, so that we may grow in the divine

life, and He has supplied us with all things related to life and godliness so that the divine seed within us may fully develop unto all the virtues of His divine nature. Therefore, we need to contact the processed Triune God all the time, keeping ourselves in the divine fel-

lowship in a fine way. Day by day we should simply remain in His dispensing to have the direct enjoyment of the divine supply of the processed Triune God in His embodiment, which is Christ, and through His ultimate consummation, which is the life-giving Spirit (Lee, *Conclusion* 1899-1900).

Second, the Father is carrying out the judgment of His government on His own house in a daily way. In order for the government of God to operate in us effectually for His positive purpose, it is crucial for us to recognize, acknowledge, consent to, agree with, and cooperate with God's dealings in our daily life through His inward touching and outward environmental sufferings. The need for our cooperation is profoundly expressed in Peter's word, "Be humbled under the mighty hand of God" (v. 6). The trials, troubles, and sufferings of the believers under the government of God cause the divine life within us to grow. We may say that all the spiritual growth in the divine life is carried out through sufferings in the environment and situations that God sovereignly apportions to us. All these sufferings afford us the best opportunity to enjoy the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity.

TRIALS, TROUBLES, AND SUFFERINGS UNDER THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD CAUSE THE DIVINE LIFE TO GROW, AFFORDING US THE BEST OPPORTUNITY TO ENJOY THE DIVINE DISPENSING OF THE DIVINE TRINITY.

The ultimate enjoyment of the eternal life and the inheritance of the eternal glory in the eternal age will be enjoyed by all those whom God has chosen, redeemed, and regenerated; this is not at issue here, nor is it in doubt. However, the New Testament reveals that believers who spend the time of their sojourning by walking according to the flesh, resisting the Lord's operation, and preserving their soul-life will suffer spiritual death rather than enjoy the divine life, in which is our hope. In such a condition, the hope of life is frustrated, and the inheritance of life is delayed. If a believer remains in this state until the end of his life in this age, he will require a further operation from God to prepare him to enjoy his inheritance in eternity.

Verse 7 of chapter 1 says that the proving of our faith may be found unto praise and glory and honor "at the revelation of Jesus Christ." It is at the revelation, the coming, of the Lord that the practical issue of the believers' faith will be approved or found lacking. At this time, His discipline on shortcoming believers under His government will transpire. Specifically, this will begin at His judgment seat, before which all believers will appear. Concerning this, W. H. Griffith Thomas writes,

This "judgment"...refers to the testing of their faithfulness since conversion and their use of God's grace (1 Cor. iii. 13-15). Christians will not appear before the Great White Throne (Rev. xx. 11), but before the judgment seat of Christ (Rom xiv. 12; 1 Cor. iv. 2-5; 2 Cor. v. 10). This thought of judgment was intended as an incentive to faithfulness, especially in view of trial and persecution. (230)

As an issue of Christ's judgment seat, some believers will enter into the joy of the Lord, but some will suffer in weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 8:12; 24:51; 25:30). To be saved from suffering under the Lord's dispensational discipline and to enter into His joy will be the salvation of our souls, which is a strong theme in the writings of Peter.

Discipline in This Age and in the Age to Come

We have seen that God's governmental dealings do not contradict His immediate forgiveness for fellowship, nor can forgiveness for fellowship always prevent governmental judgment, according to the wisdom of God and the need of the sinning believer. The paradigm for God's disciplinary judgment is that if a believer is found sinful and failing, God may change His way of dealing with him and bring in discipline upon him. Then eventually the believer is helped and perfected in the matter in which he formerly erred, and God grants His governmental forgiveness to him and releases him from discipline. Once such a sequence begins—sin, forgiveness for fellowship,

discipline, governmental forgiveness—it must be carried out to its completion, as Nee says, "If we fall under God's governmental hand, He will not let us go until we are fully forgiven" (679).

The leading teachers of the Reformation struggled with the question of how the death of a believer fits into the sequence of sin, judgment, and forgiveness, attempting to learn what happens to a believer who dies while still under the unfinished dealings of God's government. However, because they had not yet received the light of this truth, they viewed the discipline of believers in the age to come only in the context of the heresy of purgatory as taught by the Roman Catholic Church.⁶ Accordingly, all their formulations in this matter were tainted by their primary burden to combat this heresy, and as a result, they refused any idea of the government of God on the believers outside of their lives in the present age. Martin Luther fully acknowledged the "purgatory" (purgation) of the Father's dealings with the believers in their lifetime, but he insisted that no such dealings could extend beyond this. He states, "The bounds of purgatory extend not beyond this world; for here in this life the upright, good, and godly Christians are well and soundly scoured and purged" (278). He speaks well of the need to be "scoured and purged" and that the "upright, good, and godly" believers reap the harvest of sanctification, purification, and godliness from the governmental dealings assigned to them by God. This testifies of Luther's understanding of the government of God. However, to postulate that these dealings do not extend beyond "this world," that is, beyond a believer's life in the flesh, has no scriptural ground.

By the middle of the following century, in 1647, the Westminster Confession of Faith codified the erroneous concept that a believer's discipline must end at the time of his death. Section 1 of Chapter 32 says,

The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls (which neither die nor sleep), having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous, *being then made perfect in holiness*, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies. (670-671, emphasis ours)

This again is a response to the teaching of purgatory, but an unscriptural element remains in it, that is, that a Christian is "made perfect in holiness" by the act of dying. This erroneous concept has pervaded Reform-based evangelical teaching until the present time and is taken for granted as true by many God-seeking believers, closing the doors of the mind to a further, fuller revelation of the truth.⁷

In actuality, believers are made perfect in holiness by the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity in His economy, in coordination with His wise governmental discipline. This is a deep, subjective, experiential process, which requires the entire course of the Christian life, and it will be attained only by those who exercise their regenerated and living spirit, pursue the divine life, respond to the Lord, are humbled under His hand, and walk in the course that the Lord has ordained for them. Whether or not a believer has reached this point of maturity by the end of his life will be discovered at the judgment seat of Christ at His coming. The Scriptures say nothing of an instant transformation transpiring at the moment of a believer's death in the flesh.⁸ Rather, if one has not attained to maturity by the end of his life, he will require further dealings from the Lord for his ultimate perfection. Of necessity, these dealings will continue after the Lord's coming and judgment of the believers, and they will be completed before the commencement of the eternal age. Hence, they will take place during the intervening period, the millennial age, the age of the kingdom. This dispensational dealing will be the operation of God's government to fully perfect all of His children for their ultimate and consummated enjoyment of the eternal life in eternity.

As those who are under the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity and the daily governmental dealings of the wise and economical Father, we need to cooperate with Him for our growth and development in life until we reach maturity. Then we shall have a rich entrance into the coming kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Those who are faithful and reach maturity will receive a reward from the Lord, but those who are not faithful will suffer dispensational punishment. The incentive of the reward and the warning concerning punishment should encourage us to grow and mature in the divine life, add all diligence for the development of the virtues of the divine nature, and humble ourselves under the mighty hand of the God of government.

by John Campbell

Notes

¹Not many expositors adequately examine 1 and 2 Peter from the viewpoint of God's government, particularly related to His governmental dealings, His judgment through various trials, with the New Testament believers as the members of His own household. For this reason, we will draw much of our material from the writings of Witness Lee, Watchman Nee, and John N.

Darby, who were faithful witnesses of this truth in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

²In Hebrew, *gam*. In the Septuagint, πλὴν gives the clear sense of "nevertheless" (cf. Matt. 26:64), or "howbeit" as some render.

³Many of Darby's sentences are notoriously hard to parse. His meaning here is that although the government of God often cannot be seen in the world today, it is nevertheless being exercised upon His children; as a result, God will have the standing to execute His judgment in full on the world.

⁴Whether or not one may speak of God's wrath in relation to believers is an issue of debate. First Thessalonians 5:9 says, "God did not appoint us to wrath but to the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." Gerald Stanton argues, "Suffering is often the portion of the Christian...but not *wrath!* Wrath is reserved for unbelievers" (44; Rom. 1:18; 2:5, 8). We see the validity of his view, although we do not agree with all of his conclusions. To be sure, the world in its final, godless consummation will be judged in the wrath of God during the great tribulation (Rev. 6:16-17). However, this implies that the people of God who remain on the earth during this time will be at least witnesses to this wrath and will thus pass through a great

trial. To be saved from the coming destruction (1 Thes. 5:8-9) is to be kept out of the hour of trial, which is about to come on the whole inhabited earth, to try them who dwell on the earth. This is the Lord's promise to the overcomers in Philadelphia (Rev. 3:10). We will speak more concerning

God's wrath in the following installment of this department.

⁵We use the phrase *the eternal kingdom during the millennium* in the following sense. The kingdom of God is eternal not only in its timelessness but also in its content and quality. In its organic sense, the eternal kingdom is the eternal life of God Himself. Thus the kingdom, although eternal, is manifested in different ages in time. In the present age, the eternal kingdom is the seed of life growing and developing unto its full growth. In the millennial age, the eternal kingdom will be the mature manifestation, in the overcomers, of the divine life in Christ. In the eternal age, the eternal kingdom will be the fullest manifestation of the fully developed divine life in the New Jerusalem. Thus, entrance into the eternal kingdom need not refer to entrance into the kingdom in eternity, which will be the glorious portion of all the called ones. As we have seen here, the entrance into the eternal kingdom in the millennium is conditioned on the full development of the virtues of the divine life and nature in each believer.

⁶We have treated, at length, the teaching of purgatory and the Reformation reaction to it. Please see *Affirmation & Critique*, IX.1, April 2004: 56-69 and IX.2, October 2004: 78-95.

⁷In the principle of the Lord's recovery of truths once lost, it is fair, if not obvious, to say that He has not given new light on His Word to only one group of persons or all at once. Thus, in retrospect we can easily speak of the shortcomings and even errors in the teachings of the Reformation. William Kelly freely does so in his commentary of 2 Peter 1:7, in which he cites John Calvin's remarks on the verse as "singularly meagre." Kelly says that Calvin's exposition of the verse, though "enough to represent the mind of the Reformers," is "wholly defective and erroneous" (54).

In the same year that the Westminster Confession of Faith was being drawn up as a statement of Calvinist orthodoxy, Edward Winslow published his account of the counsel of John Robinson, the pastor of the Pilgrim fathers at Leiden who were about to depart to New England. He records,

He took occasion also miserably to bewail the state and condition of the Reformed Churches, who were come to a period in Religion, and would go no further than the instruments of their Reformation: As for example, the Lutherans they could not be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw, for whatever part of God's will He had further imparted and revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it. And so also, saith he, you see the Calvinists, they stick where he left them: A misery to be lamented; For though they were precious shining lights in their times, yet God had not revealed His whole will to them. (97, some archaisms updated for readability)

Robinson was confident that "the Lord had more truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy Word" (97). To cite a defect in the Westminster Confession, as we have done here, is wholly in the line of the Lord's progressive and gradual giving of more light for the full recovery of the truth.

⁸We are careful here to distinguish between the transformation of the soul and the transfiguration of the body (Phil. 3:21). First Corinthians 15:51-52, which speaks of being changed "in the twinkling of an eye" refers to the latter, not the former, and it takes place not at a believer's death but at the rapture of the living believers at Christ's coming.

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