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**COMMENTARY**

**DARBY'S SYNOPSIS OF THE  
BOOKS OF THE BIBLE  
PART 2: NEW TESTAMENT**

*by John Nelson Darby*

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## John Nelson Darby, 1800-1882

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## 2 PETER

The second epistle of Peter is even more simple than the first. Like those of Jude and John, it is written essentially with a view to the seducers, who, with large promises of liberty, beguiled souls into sin and licentiousness, denying the coming of Christ, and in fact disowning all His rights over them. The epistle admonishes the same Christians to whom the first was written, pointing out the characteristic features of these false teachers; denouncing them with the utmost energy; explaining the long-sufferance of God, and announcing a judgment which, like His patience, would befit the majesty of Him who was to execute it.

## 2 PETER

But before giving these warnings, which begin with chapter 2, the apostle exhorts Christians to make their own calling and election sure — not evidently in the heart of God, but as a fact in their own hearts, and in practical life, by walking in such a manner as not to stumble; so that testimony to their portion in Christ should be always evident, and an abundant entrance be ministered to them.

These exhortations are founded, firstly, on that which is already given to Christians; secondly, on that which is future — namely, the manifestation of the glory of the kingdom. In touching upon this last subject, he indicates a still more excellent portion — the bright morning star, the heavenly Christ Himself and our association with Him before He appears as the Sun of righteousness. Thirdly, we shall see that the warnings are founded also on another basis — namely, the dissolution of the heavens and the earth, proving the instability of all that unbelief rested upon, and furnishing for the same reason a solemn warning to the saints to induce them to walk in holiness.

The apostle describes his brethren as having obtained the same precious faith as himself through the faithfulness of God\* to the promises made to the fathers, for that surely is the force of the word “righteousness” in this

place. The faithfulness of the God of Israel had bestowed on His people this faith (that is to say, Christianity), which was so precious to them.

[\* This passage may be translated “of our God and Savior Jesus Christ,” and perhaps ought to be so rendered since it speaks of the faithfulness of God to His promise. The epistle to the Hebrews dwells also on the fact that Jesus is Jehovah.]

Faith here is the portion we have now in the things that God gives, which in Christianity are revealed as truths, while the things promised are not yet come. It was in this way that the believing Jews were to possess the Messiah, and all that God gave in Him, as the Lord had said, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. There are many mansions in my Father’s house; I go to prepare a place for you.” That is to say, “You do not visibly possess God; you enjoy Him by believing in Him. It is the same with respect to Me: you will not possess Me corporeally, but you shall enjoy all that is in Me — righteousness, and all the promises of God — by believing.” It was thus that these believing Jews, to whom Peter wrote, possessed the Lord: they had received this precious faith.

He wishes them, as is the custom, “Grace and peace,” adding, “through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” It is the knowledge of God and of Jesus, which is the center and the support of faith, that which nourishes it, and in which it is developed and divinely enlarged, and which guards it from the vain imaginings of seducers. But there is a living power with this knowledge — a divine power in that which God is to believers — as He is revealed in this knowledge to faith; and this divine power has given to us all that pertains to life and godliness. By the realising knowledge which we possess of Him who has called us, this divine power becomes available and efficacious for all that appertains to life and godliness — “the knowledge of him who hath called us by glory and by virtue.”

Thus we have here, the call of God to pursue glory as our object, gaining the victory by virtue — spiritual courage — over all the enemies that we find in our path. It is not a law given to a people already gathered together, but glory proposed in order to be reached by spiritual energy. Moreover we have divine power acting according to its own efficacy, for the life of God in us, and for godliness.

How precious it is to know that faith can use this divine power, realised in the life of the soul, directing it towards glory as its end! What a safeguard from the efforts of the enemy, if we are really established in the consciousness of this divine power acting on our behalf in grace! The heart is led to make glory its object; and virtue, the strength of spiritual life, is developed on the way to it. Divine power has given us all needed.

Now, in connection with these two things — namely, with glory and with the energy of life — very great and precious promises are given us; for all the promises in Christ are developed either in the glory, or in the life which leads to it. By means of these promises, we are made partakers of the divine nature; for this divine power, which is realised in life and godliness, is connected with these great and precious promises that relate either to the glory, or to virtue in the life that leads to it — that is to say, it is divine power which develops itself, in realising the glory and heavenly walk which characterises it in its own nature. We are thus made morally partakers of the divine nature, by divine power acting in us and fixing the soul on what is divinely revealed. Precious truth! Privilege so exalted! and which renders us capable of enjoying God Himself, as well as all good.

By the same action of this divine power, we escape the corruption that is in the world through lust; for the divine power delivers us from it. Not only do we not yield to it, but we are occupied elsewhere, and the action of the enemy upon the flesh is kept off; the desires from which one could not cleanse oneself are removed; the corrupt relationship of the heart with its object ceases. It is a real deliverance; we have the mastery over ourselves in this respect; we are set free from sin.

But it is not enough to have escaped by faith from even the inward dominion of the desires of the flesh; we must add to faith — to that faith which realizes divine power, and the glory of Christ that shall be revealed — we must add to faith, virtue. This is the first thing. It is, as we have said, the moral courage which overcomes difficulties, and governs the heart by curbing all action of the old nature. It is an energy by which the heart is master of itself, and is able to choose the good, and to cast aside the evil, as a thing conquered and unworthy of oneself. This indeed is grace; but the apostle is here speaking of the thing itself, as it is realised in the heart, and not of its source. I have said that this is the first thing; because, practically,

this self-government — this virtue, this moral energy — is deliverance from evil, and renders communion with God possible. It is the one thing which gives reality to all the rest, for without virtue we are not really with God. Can divine power develop itself in the laxity of the flesh? And if we are not really with God — if the new nature is not acting — knowledge is but the puffing up of the flesh; patience but a natural quality, or else hypocrisy; and so on with the rest. But where there is this virtue, it is very precious to add knowledge to it. We have then divine wisdom and intelligence to guide our walk: the heart is enlarged, sanctified, spiritually developed, by a more complete and profound acquaintance with God, who acts in the heart and is reflected in the walk. We are guarded from more errors — we are more humble, more sober-minded: we know better where our treasure is, and what it is, and that everything else is but vanity and a hindrance. It is therefore a true knowledge of God that is here meant.

Thus walking in the knowledge of God, the flesh, the will, the desires, are bridled; all their practical power diminishes, and they disappear as habits of the soul; they are not fed. We are moderate; there is self-restraint; we do not give way to our desires; temperance is added to knowledge. The apostle is not speaking of the walk, but of the state of the heart in the walk. Still, being thus governed, and the will bridled, one bears patiently with others; and the circumstances that must be passed through are, in all respects, born according to the will of God, be they what they may. We add patience to temperance. The heart, the spiritual life, is then free to enjoy its true objects — a principle of deep importance in the christian life. When the flesh is at work in one way or another (even if its action is purely inward), if there is anything whatever that the conscience ought to be exercised about, the soul cannot be in the enjoyment of communion with God in the light, because the effect of the light is then to bring the conscience into exercise. But when the conscience has nothing that is not already judged in the light, the new man is in action with regard to God, whether in realising the joy of His presence or in glorifying Him in a life characterised by godliness. We enjoy communion with God; we walk with God; we add to patience godliness.

The heart being thus in communion with God, affection flows out freely towards those who are dear to Him, and who, sharing the same nature,

necessarily draw out the affections of the spiritual heart: brotherly love is developed.

There is another principle, which crowns and governs and gives character to all others: it is charity, love properly so called. This, in its root, is the nature of God Himself, the source and perfection of every other quality that adorns christian life. The distinction between love and brotherly love is of deep importance; the former is indeed, as we have just said, the source whence the latter flows; but as this brotherly love exists in mortal men, it may be mingled in its exercise with sentiments that are merely human, with individual affection, with the effect of personal attractions, or that of habit, of suitability in natural character. Nothing is sweeter than brotherly affections; their maintenance is of the highest importance in the assembly; but they may degenerate, as they may grow cool; and if love, if God, does not hold the chief place, they may displace Him — set Him aside — shut Him out. Divine love, which is the very nature of God, directs, rules, and gives character to brotherly love; otherwise it is that which pleases us — that is, our own heart — that governs us. If divine love governs me, I love all my brethren; I love them because they belong to Christ; there is no partiality. I shall have greater enjoyment in a spiritual brother; but I shall occupy myself about my weak brother with a love that rises above his weakness and has tender consideration for it. I shall concern myself with my brother's sin, from love to God, in order to restore my brother, rebuking him, if needful; nor, if divine love be in exercise, can brotherly love, or its name, be associated with disobedience. In a word, God will have His place in all my relationships. To exact brotherly love in such a manner as to shut out the requirements of that which God is, and of His claims upon us, is to shut out God in the most plausible way, in order to gratify our own hearts. Divine love then, which acts according to the nature, character, and will of God, is that which ought to direct and characterise our whole christian walk, and have authority over every movement of our hearts. Without this, all that brotherly love can do is to substitute man for God. Divine love is the bond of perfectness, for it is God, who is love, working in us and making Himself the governing object of all that passes in the heart.

Now, if these things are in us, the knowledge of Jesus will not be barren in our hearts. But if, on the contrary, they are wanting, we are blind; we

cannot see far into the things of God; our view is contracted; it is limited by the narrowness of a heart governed by its own will, and turned aside by its own lusts. We forget that we have been cleansed from our old sins; we lose sight of the position Christianity has given us. This state of things is not the loss of assurance, but the forgetfulness of the true christian profession into which we are brought — purity in contrast with the ways of the world.

Therefore we ought to use diligence, in order to have the consciousness of our election fresh and strong, so as to walk in spiritual liberty. Thus doing, we shall not stumble; and thus an abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom will be our portion. Here, as throughout, we see that the apostle's mind is occupied with the government of God, applying it to His dealing with believers, in reference to their conduct and its practical consequences. He is not speaking in an absolute way of pardon and salvation, but of the kingdom — of the manifestation of His power who judges righteously — whose sceptre is a sceptre of righteousness. Walking in the ways of God, we have part in that kingdom, entering into it with assurance, without difficulty, without that hesitation of soul which is experienced by those who grieve the Holy Ghost, and get a bad conscience, and allow themselves in things that do not accord with the character of the kingdom, or who show by their negligence that their heart is not in it. If on the contrary the heart cleaves to the kingdom, and our ways are suitable to it, our conscience is in unison with its glory. The way is open before us: we see into the distance, and we go forward, having no impediments in our way. Nothing turns us aside as we walk in the path that leads to the kingdom, occupied with things suitable to it. God has no controversy with one who walks thus. The entrance into the kingdom is widely opened to him according to the ways of God in government.

The apostle desires, therefore, to remind them of these things, although they knew them, purposing, so long as he was in his earthly tabernacle, to stir up their pure hearts to keep them in remembrance; for soon would he have laid aside his earthly vessel, as the Lord had told him, and by thus writing to them, he took care that they should always bear them in mind.

It is very plain that he was not expecting other apostles to be raised up, nor an ecclesiastical succession to take their place as guardians of the faith,



or as possessing sufficient authority to be a foundation for the faith of believers. He was to provide for this himself, in order that, on his removal, they might find something on his part that would remind the faithful of the instructions he had given them. For this purpose he wrote his epistle.

The divine importance and certainty of that which he taught were worthy of this labor. We have not, says the apostle, followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of His majesty.

The apostle is speaking, as his words plainly show, of the transfiguration. I notice it here, in order to mark more evidently that in his thoughts of the Lord's coming he does not go beyond His appearing in glory. For the moment He was hidden from those who trusted in Him: this was a great trial of their faith, for the Jews were accustomed, as we know, to look for a visible and glorious Messiah. To believe without seeing was the lesson they had to learn; and it was a magnificent support to their faith, this fact, that the apostle, who taught them, had, with his two companions, seen, with their own eyes, the glory of Christ manifested — had seen it displayed before them, together with that of former saints who share His kingdom. At that time Jesus received, in testimony from God the Father, honor and glory; a voice addressing Him from the excellent glory — from the cloud, which was to a Jew the well-known dwelling-place of Jehovah the Most High God — owning Him as His well-beloved Son; a voice which the three apostles also heard (even as they saw His glory), when they were with Him on the holy mount.\*

[\* In Luke 9 the higher part of the blessing is brought before us. They feared when they entered into the cloud. God had talked with Moses from the cloud face to face, but here they enter into it. The heavenly and eternal character, what is perpetual as moral, is much more brought out in Luke.]

We see that it is here the glory of the kingdom, and not the dwelling in the Father's house for ever with the Lord, which occupies the apostle. It is a manifestation to men living on the earth; it is the power of the Lord, the glory which He receives from God the Father as the Messiah, acknowledged to be His Son, and crowned with glory and honor before the eyes of the world. It is into the everlasting kingdom that the apostle wishes them to have an enlarged entrance. It is the power and glory that Christ received from God, which the apostle saw, and to which he bears

testimony. We shall indeed have this glory, but it is not our portion, properly so called: for this is within the house, to be the bride of the Lamb, and it does not display itself to the world. With regard however to the assembly the two things cannot be separated; if we are the bride, we shall assuredly participate in the glory of the kingdom.\* To the Jew, who was accustomed to look for this glory (whatever might be his idea respecting it), the fact of the apostle's having seen it was of inestimable importance. It was the heavenly glory of the kingdom, as it shall be manifested to the world; a glory that shall be seen when the Lord returns in power (compare Mark 9:1). It is a communicated glory which comes from the excellent glory. Moreover the testimony of the prophets relates to the manifested glory; they spoke of the kingdom and glory, and the brightness of the transfiguration was a splendid confirmation of their words. We have, says the apostle, the words of the prophets confirmed. Those words proclaimed indeed the glory of the kingdom which was to come, and the judgment of the world, which was to make way for its establishment on earth. This announcement was a light in the darkness of our world, truly a dark place, that had no other light than the testimony which God had given, through the prophets, of that which shall happen to it, and of the future kingdom whose light shall finally dispel the darkness of separation from God in which the world lies. Prophecy was a light that shone during the darkness of the night; but there was another light for those that watched.

[\* Compare Luke 12, where the joy within the house is connected with watching; the inheritance with service.]

For the remnant of the Jews, the Sun of righteousness should rise with healing in His wings; the wicked should be trodden as ashes under the feet of the righteous. The Christian, instructed in his own privileges, knows the Lord in a different way from this, although he believes in those solemn truths. He watches during the night, which is already far spent. He sees in his heart, by faith,\* the dawn of day, and the rising of the bright star of the morning. He knows the Lord as they know Him who believe in Him before He is manifested, as coming for the pure heavenly joy of His own before the brightness of the day shines forth. They who watch see the dawn of day; they see the morning star. Thus we have our portion in Christ not only in the day, and as the prophets spoke of Him, which all relates to the

earth, although the blessing comes from on high; we have the secret of Christ and of our union with Him, and of His coming to receive us to Himself as the morning star, before the day comes. We are His during the night; we shall be with Him in the truth of that heavenly bond which unites us to Him, as set apart for Himself while the world does not see Him. We shall be gathered to Him, before the world sees Him, that we may enjoy Himself, and in order that the world may see us with Him when He appears.

[\* This is the construction of the sentence: “We have also the prophetic word confirmed, in giving heed to which ye do well (as to a light shining in a dark place), until the day shall dawn, and the morning star arise, in your hearts.”

The joy of our portion is, that we shall be with Himself, “for ever with the Lord.” Prophecy enlightens the Christian, and separates him from the world, by testimony to its judgment, and the glory of the coming kingdom. The testimony of the Spirit to the assembly does this, by the attraction of Christ Himself, the bright morning star — our portion while the world is still buried in sleep.

The bright morning star is Christ Himself, when (before the day, which will be produced by His appearing) He is ready to receive the assembly, that she may enter into His own peculiar joy. Thus it is said, “I am the bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16). This is what He is for the assembly, as He is the root and offspring of David for Israel.

Consequently, as soon as He says “the morning star,” the Spirit, who dwells in the assembly and inspires her thoughts, and the bride, the assembly itself which waits for her Lord, say, “Come!” Thus, in Revelation 2:28, the faithful in Thyatira are promised by the Lord that He will give them the morning star; that is to say, joy with Himself in heaven. The kingdom and the power had been already promised them according to Christ’s own rights (v. 26, 27); but the assembly’s proper portion is Christ Himself. In addition to the declaration of the prophets, with regard to the kingdom, it is thus that the assembly expects Him.

The apostle goes on to warn the faithful, that the prophecies of scripture were not like the utterances of human will, and were not to be interpreted as though each had a separate solution — as though every prophecy were sufficient to itself for the explanation of its full meaning. They were all

parts of one whole, having one and the same object, even the kingdom of God; and each event was a preliminary step towards this object, and a link in the chain of God's government which led to it, impossible to be explained, unless the aim of the whole were apprehended — the revealed aim of the counsels of God in the glory of His Christ. For holy men, moved by the Holy Ghost, pronounced these oracles, one and the same Spirit directing and co-ordaining the whole for the development of the ways of God to the eye of faith, ways which would terminate in the establishment of that kingdom, the glory of which had appeared at the transfiguration.

Thus we have here (chap. 1) these three things: — Firstly, divine power for all that appertains to life and godliness, a declaration of infinite value, the pledge of our true liberty. Divine power acts in us, it gives to us all needed to enable us to walk in the christian life.

Secondly, there is the government of God, in connection with the faithfulness of the believer, in order that a wide and abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom may be granted us, and that we may not stumble. The great result of this government will be manifested in the establishment of the kingdom, the glory of which was seen on the holy mount by the three apostles.

But, thirdly, for the Christian there was something better than the kingdom, something to which the apostle merely alludes, for it was not the especial subject of the communications of the Holy Ghost to him as it was to the Apostle Paul, namely, Christ taking the assembly to Himself, a point not found either in the promises or the prophecies, but which forms the precious and inestimable joy and hope of the Christian taught of God.

This first chapter has thus taught us the divine aspect of the christian position, given to the apostle for the instruction, in the last days, of believers from among the circumcision. The next two chapters set before us, on the other hand, the two forms of evil that characterise the last days — the false and corrupt teaching of bad men, and the unbelief which denies the return of the Lord on the ground of the stability of the visible creation. The former really denies the Master who bought them. It is no question here as to the title of the Lord, nor of redemption. The simile is of a master who has purchased slaves at the market, and they disown and refuse to

obey him. Thus among the converted Jews there would be false teachers, who disowned the authority of Christ — His rights over them. Many would be led away by them; and as they bore the name of Christians, the way of truth would be brought into disrepute by their means; while in fact, by their covetousness and hypocritical words, they would make merchandise of Christians for their private gain, count them as mere instruments of it. But the resource of faith is always in God. Judgment would overtake them. The examples of the fallen angels, of Noah and the deluge, of Lot and Sodom, proved that the Lord knew how to deliver the righteous out of their trials, and to reserve the unrighteous for the day of judgment.

That which would characterise this class of evildoers would be the unbridled license of their conduct. They would indulge their carnal lusts, and despise all authority in a way that angels would not dare to do. Still they would call themselves Christians and associate with Christians in their love-feasts, deceiving their own hearts, addicting themselves continually to evil, promising liberty to others, but themselves the slaves of corruption.

Now, to be thus re-entangled in evil, after having escaped it through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior, was worse than if they had never known anything of the way of truth. But it was according to the true proverb — The dog had returned to his own vomit, and the sow that had been washed, to her wallowing in the mire. They were apostates therefore; but here the Spirit of God does not so much point out the apostasy as the evil, because the government of God is still in view. In Jude the apostasy is the prominent thing. Peter tells us that the angels sinned; Jude, that they kept not their first estate. But God will judge the wicked.

In the last chapter, as we have said, it is materialism: trust in the stability of that which can be seen, in contrast with trust in the word of God which teaches us to look for the coming of Jesus, the return of the Lord. They judge by their senses. There is, say they, no appearance of change. This is not the case. To the eye of man it is indeed true that there is none. But these unbelievers are wilfully ignorant of the fact that the world has been already judged once; that the waters, out of which by the mighty word of God the earth came, had for the moment swallowed it up again, all

perishing except those whom God preserved in the ark. And by the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. It is not that the Lord is slack concerning the promise of His return, but that He is still exercising grace, not wishing any to perish, but that all should come to repentance. And a thousand years are to Him but as a day, and a day as a thousand years. But the day of the Lord shall come, in which all things will pass away, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and all that is on the earth will be consumed. Solemn consideration for the children of God, to maintain them in complete separation from evil, and from all that is seen, looking for and hastening the day in which the heavens shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat! Everything on which the hopes of the flesh are founded shall disappear for ever.

Nevertheless, there shall be new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness shall dwell. It is not here said, "shall reign," which would be the thousand years of the Lord's dominion; here it is the eternal state, in which the government, that has brought all things into order, will terminate, and unhindered blessing will flow from God, the kingdom being given up to God the Father.

It is in following out the ways of God in government that the apostle carries them on to the eternal state, in which the promise will be finally accomplished. The millennium itself was the restitution, of which the prophets had spoken; and, morally, the heavens and the earth had been changed by the imprisonment of Satan and the reign of Christ (see Isaiah 65:17, 18, Jerusalem having been made a rejoicing); and the heavens indeed entirely cleared by power, never to be defiled by Satan again, the saints on high too in their eternal state, the earth delivered, but not yet finally freed. But, materially, the dissolution of the elements was necessary for the renewal of all things.

It will be observed, that the Spirit does not speak here of the coming of Christ, except to say that it will be scoffed at in the last days. He speaks of the day of God, in contrast with the trust of unbelievers in the stability of the material things of creation, which depends, as the apostle shows, on the word of God. And in that day everything on which unbelievers rested and will rest shall be dissolved and pass away. This will not be at the

commencement of the day, but at its close; and here we are free to reckon this day, according to the apostle's word, as a thousand years, or whatever length of period the Lord shall see fit.

So solemn a dissolution of all that the flesh rests upon should lead us so to walk as to be found of the Lord, when He comes to introduce that day, in peace and blameless; accounting that the apparent delay is only the Lord's grace, exercised for the salvation of souls. We may well wait, if God makes use of this time to rescue souls from judgment, by bringing them to the knowledge of Himself, and saving them with an everlasting salvation. This, the apostle says, had been taught by Paul, who wrote to them (the Hebrew believers) of these things, as he did also in his other epistles.

It is interesting to see that Peter, who had been openly rebuked before all by Paul, introduces him here with entire affection. He notices that Paul's epistles contained an exalted doctrine, which they who were unstable, and not taught of God, perverted. For Peter in fact does not follow Paul in the field on which the latter had entered. This however does not prevent his speaking of Paul's writings as forming a part of the scriptures; "as also the other scriptures," he says. This is an important testimony; which moreover gives the same character to the writings of one who is able to bestow this title on the writings of another.

Let Christians then be watchful, and not allow themselves to be seduced by the errors of the wicked, but strive to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen!