

AN APOSTOLIC FAREWELL

BY B. G. ECHOLS

In the miscellaneous thoughts of the closing verses of I Peter we have, in the multiplicity of ideas, an underlying feeling of the apostle's attachment to the saints to whom he wrote. We first observe his evaluation of a brother, "By Silvanus, our faithful brother, as I account him, I have written unto you briefly" (1 Pet. 5:12a). Silvanus was apparently the Silas of Acts who was active in the church in Jerusalem and who later accompanied Paul. Peter says he wrote "by Silvanus" which means either Peter dictated the words to Silvanus, or that Silas carried the letter to its destination. Both practices were common.

Peter's evaluation of Silas is "our faithful brother, as I account him." Peter had carefully estimated the work of Silas and this is his judgment. There were many early disciples who proved to be unfaithful (2 Tim. 4:10). To be faithful simply means "to be trusted or reliable." Silas was a brother who could be trusted to do his part. This judgment must have been based on some very obvious factors. Faithfulness to God is based on action for God according to God's will (Rev. 2:10).

The faithful are the real strength of any church. Some people may be brilliant, some clever, and others eloquent, but the church is not dependent on such. It relies on the faithful. When some are unstable and fickle, the faithful keep Christ's cause alive day in and day out, in good times and bad. If Peter were in our midst would he write of us as he did of Silas? Would he speak of us as faithful? Would you want the apostle to write your report card? Would it read like that of Silas or that of Demas?

Peter continues with his concern for all the saints, "exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God; stand ye fast therein" (1 Pet. 5:12b). Exhorting involves earnest persuasion. Its purpose is to urge people to pursue a certain course. It is a forward looking word. This entire epistle is devoted mainly to this purpose. One notable feature of the letter is its use of imperatives. There is a continuous chain of exhortations all through the book. These give the epistle a directness which re-

sembles a preaching style as he calls on Christians to be faithful, humble, and steady in their service.

If Peter is testifying of the true grace of God, something must be considered false. How can we know without a revelation of God? The apostle seeks to supply indisputable evidence of the soundness of the faith which they possessed. We must listen to the apostles to know the true grace of God. It was the true grace that had been bestowed upon the first readers. They must not be moved from it to something else. They must not waver in times of stress. They must never suppose that because of trials, God does not care. They knew the genuine grace of God. They were enjoying the blessings of God's grace. The continued existence of the church in the world is by the true grace of God. There is nothing in the world to account for the church. Its existence is dependent upon the seed (Luke 8:11). There is nothing in us to explain our relationship to God. It is by His grace that we worship Him and call Him our Father in heaven (1 Pet. 5:10).

The power of His grace is still with us. It can produce the same fruit in the slum or the penthouse. It persists in adverse circumstances. This whole letter shows the power of God's grace in persecution. Persecution is powerless to extinguish Christ. As they had entered God's grace, there Peter exhorts them to stand. Peter exhorts all who know the grace of God to be steadfast and to stand firm without wavering.

Peter concludes with the concern of saints for other saints, "She that is in Babylon, elect together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Mark my son. Salute one another with a kiss of love" (1 Pet. 5:13, 14a). Many feel "she" is the church, but others claim some particular woman is saluting them along with Mark. One idea is that the woman is Peter's wife who accompanied him on his travels (1 Cor. 9:5). The church, however, is often spoken of in a feminine sense. It was this interpretation of I Peter that led to the word "church" being added in the King James Version. It is not an unnatural interpretation. What is clear is the concern she felt in saluting

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the brethren. The salutation of Christians was no mere formality, but a genuine expression of concern and interest. This is the way the saints felt about saints everywhere.

The salutation comes from one who was elect or chosen. The word "elect," when understood, is one of the most comforting words of the N.T. It is meant for comfort here. Someone greater than man has set His choice upon them and grace and peace flow from Him. We may be scattered over the earth, but we are still God's elect. Even in severe persecution, God's hand is near. God will not lose His elect (Mt. 24:31). She who sent greeting was "chosen together" with them which indicates the unity of all of God's people regardless of their nation. We are all one in Christ (Gal. 3:26-28). If we are chosen together for suffering now, we shall share glory together in heaven. The greeting of all saints is to be in love. Greeting by means of a kiss appears to have been a common practice in the early church. There are numerous references to it. The kiss was never on the lips, but rather on the cheek, forehead, hands, and even feet. The apostle did not command kissing as a method of greeting. The custom was already in existence. He seeks to take a common greeting and give it a holy significance. The kiss was to be of love and an exhibition of love.

Mark is here styled the "son" of Peter. While it could refer to a true, physical son of Peter, it is most likely the John Mark of Acts. Mark wrote one of the gospels and this has traditionally been called the "gospel of Peter." The fact that the two were together at this time accounts for this connecting the gospel of Mark to Peter.

The location of Peter in Babylon has given rise to much controversy. In order to get Peter in Rome to claim him a pope, Catholics have said that Babylon refers to Rome. Some Protestant commentators have similarly taught. There is no historical evidence that Peter was in Rome, and even if he were, that wouldn't make him pope anymore than it made Paul pope. All the other geographical references in I Peter are literal. Why should we conclude that Babylon is an exception?

Peter closes his epistle with "Peace be unto you all that are in Christ" (1 Pet. 5:14b). In face of their persecution and trial, they could have peace. Peace of mind and soul comes only through and in Christ (Jn. 14:27; Eph. 5:23). The epistle ends as it begins, with peace (1 Pet. 1:2). Such has been true for His disciples always. Jesus' disciples have solved the

paradox of living by finding peace in the midst of storms, a table in the presence of enemies. God's grace and peace are sufficient in all things.

(Author's Note: This concludes our series of studies in I Peter. They were drawn from notes collected over four decades. Therefore, a bibliography is impossible. BGE)



Moments of Meditation...

Public Corrections

When Johnny is sitting at his desk at school and writes with his pencil "2 plus 2 equals 5," the teacher may look over his shoulder and privately call attention to his error. Johnny can almost unnoticed take his eraser and rub out his mistake. The class may never know that Johnny mis-added 2 plus 2.

But if Johnny writes "2 plus 2 equals 5" on the chalkboard, and all the class is watching, the teacher does not really correct the error if she says nothing to the class, pats Johnny approvingly on the head, and then later takes him aside and explains his mistake privately. Nor can Johnny, upon discovering the error himself, sit and correct privately at his desk with a pencil eraser the mistake he made publicly at the chalkboard. "Two plus two is four, Johnny," says the teacher before the whole class, and the mistake that was made at the chalkboard is corrected at the chalkboard.

"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed... when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all..." (Gal. 2:11-14). "Them that sin rebuke before all..." (1 Tim. 5:20).

Private sins and personal differences are properly to be corrected privately. Nothing is gained by publicity. But public error is properly to be corrected publicly. Remember, the mistake that is made at the chalkboard before the whole class is not fully corrected with a pencil eraser at the desk after school.

- Jere E. Frost