

# 1. The Scriptures and the Last Days

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Date: 03 May 2009

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, do turn, if you would, to Peter's second letter, page 1019 in the Church Visitors' Bibles. Tonight and for the next five or six Sunday evenings or so, I want to turn our thoughts to this second letter of Peter, and particularly to focus on the third chapter.

We just finished studying this, actually, in our Wednesday lunchtime congregation, but that's almost wholly a different congregation to those who are here on Sundays. About, I guess, 180 folk or so now come at 1.10 on a Wednesday for our 30-minute service, but very few of our own Sunday congregation here are part of that.

But we've been finding in recent weeks that this has been a very timely study indeed, because it's clearly spoken to very much the situation that we're facing in our own church and our own land, and indeed in the West in general, in the Christian church today.

Now, I know that a few of you will have been on Wednesdays and will have heard some of what I'm going to say. If you have, don't go to sleep. Consider it a refresher, and listen out, because having a little bit more time does mean that we're able to go into a few things in a little more detail.

But it certainly has proved a very timely study indeed for our world today, because we find ourselves in these early days back in our church building here in Buchanan Street, we find ourselves facing days of great turmoil in the world, don't we?

[ 1 : 39 ] People have been shaken out of their complacency over the last six months or so, all over the world. I think that's true to say. The world is having a reality check.

Above all, it's been the economic collapse and chaos and the frantic attempts of governments all around the world to try and put a stop to it and try and put it right. But, of course, we've had increasingly now other things coming into the fray.

People are very, very worried, aren't they, about the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and in Pakistan, with the worries that are going on there, with the rise of the Taliban all over again. Just in recent days, we've got the added worry about this new swine flu and all that that might bring. The world is full of all kinds of uncertainties, and people are really very nervous.

Of course, in the church, we don't miss out on these things. We don't somehow escape these things just by being Christians. In fact, we have a whole load of additional concerns as well, don't we?

[ 2 : 45 ] These are difficult days for the church of Jesus Christ, increasingly in the Western world and in our own land, as I said this morning, quoting from that newspaper article. There's an increasing pressure on the Christian church and on Christian believers, even in our own land today.

We're living in difficult days. I believe we'll live in even more difficult days as the months and years unfold. And so it's just as well that we have this letter from Peter, the Apostle of Jesus, a letter that he wrote, first of all, in the first century to encourage Christians living in exactly that, in very, very tough and concerning circumstances.

And Peter says they're living in the travail of the last days. And of course, we Christians today, we're still living in these last days, the final days, the final era of world history, the era that began with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and will end only when the Lord Jesus comes again, to end history as we know it forever.

Now that's no surprise, by the way, that we're still living in these days that Peter spoke about. If you look down to chapter 3, verse 8, we'll come to this eventually, it's very clear that Peter knows that there's going to be delay with the Lord a day as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day. The Lord is not slow as some kind slowness. No, it's not a surprise to him. And so everything that he says here is just as relevant for us today as it was when it was first written.

[ 4 : 25 ] So there's much to teach us about how we're to think and how we're to live as Christians living through the world's last days. Whatever those days may bring for us in our lives and in our

national life and international life.

So we're going to spend a few weeks getting to grips with what Peter teaches us here in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And tonight I want to think very particularly about the scriptures and the last days.

The first thing and the most important thing that Peter draws our attention to in this letter and all through this letter is the vital importance of the scriptures. They are, he says, the authoritative key and the sufficient guide for all Christians, for all churches and for all time.

And it's very important. And let me just say, by the way, at this point, that is what the Church of Scotland, our denomination, believes. That is what our public statements say.

I wonder if you've ever heard anybody read this to you. Let me quote to you from the declaratory articles of the Church of Scotland. I think you might be surprised and encouraged by what they say.

[ 5 : 42 ] Here's the first one. The Church of Scotland is part of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church, worshipping one God, almighty, all-wise, and all-loving, in the trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the same in substance, equal in power and glory, adoring the Father, infinite in majesty, of whom are all things.

Confessing our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son, made very man for our salvation, glorying in his cross and resurrection. And owning obedience to him as the head over all things to his Church.

Trusting in the promised renewal and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Proclaiming the forgiveness of sins and acceptance with God through faith in Christ and the gift of eternal life.

And laboring for the advancement of the kingdom of God throughout the world. The Church of Scotland adheres to the Scottish Reformation. Receives the word of God which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament as its supreme rule of faith and life.

And avows the fundamental doctrines of the Catholic faith founded thereupon. The second article goes on. The principal subordinate standard of the Church of Scotland is the Westminster Confession of Faith approved by the General Assembly of 1647 containing the sum and substance of the faith of the Reformed Church.

[ 7 : 14 ] So when Peter says that the scriptures are the authoritative key and the sufficient guide for all Christians at all churches for all time, that is precisely what the articles of the Church of Scotland assent to and agree with and proclaim.

So let's be clear about that. Anybody who is trying to move us away from that is trying to move us away from the foundation that our Church was built upon and proclaims. So let's just keep that clear in our minds, especially in these days.

We're facing calls, aren't we, by some people to say we should ignore these things altogether. What they're asking us to do is ignore the very substance of the faith that the Church is founded upon.

They therefore can't be speaking for the Church of Scotland, can they?

Can they? I want to hear a louder no there. Can they? No. No. No. Right. Okay. Right. Back to 2 Peter. One or two things to notice, first of all.

And the first is this. Peter is writing this letter not, not to eminent church leaders and teachers. He's writing it to ordinary Christian believers, people like you and me.

[ 8 : 31 ] And he's doing that precisely because the problem is that prominent leaders and teachers in the Church are starting to teach false things and lead people in false directions. So Peter is doing what every Church leader in today's world needs to be doing and that is encouraging every single member of the Church to know the truth and stand for the truth and fight for the truth and proclaim the truth.

He's writing to mobilize the members of the Church so they will not be led astray by false teachers who claim authority but have no true authority from Jesus Christ at all.

So chapter 3 verse 1 where he says, I'm writing to you, beloved, plural. He's writing a direct word of encouragement to ordinary Christian people.

Everybody just like us. And it is a word of encouragement. Look back to the very first verse of the letter that we read, chapter 1, verse 1.

He's writing to you, to those, he says, who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours.

[ 9 : 44 ] Do you see the extraordinary privilege of ordinary Christian people? We have obtained a faith of equal standing with the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what you and I have. Isn't that extraordinary? So that means there's nothing ordinary about an ordinary Christian, is there? Because, he says in verse 2, you can have a real knowledge of our

God and of Jesus our Lord.

We can know Jesus as intimately as Peter or any other of the apostles of Jesus Christ. Because our God and Savior is Jesus Christ.

And if we know him, we have that extraordinary and remarkable privilege of the deepest and most intimate knowledge and relationship that is possible with our Savior.

It's not that the apostles are up here and the prophets here and way down at the bottom. We are there. No. We're right up there. Equal standing with them.

[10:53] That means we don't need any special priests or leaders to give us something extra. It's ours already. It's a high privilege given to us by Jesus. But, of course, always with great privilege comes great responsibility, doesn't it?

We must grow and be faithful in that knowledge of God, our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ. Look down to verse 8 of chapter 1. We're not to be ineffective, he says, in our knowledge of God.

Let me just read verses 5 to 8. Again, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue and virtue with knowledge and knowledge with self-control and self-control with steadfastness and steadfastness with godliness and godliness with brotherly affection, brotherly affection with love.

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If you turn over to the very last verse of Peter's letter in chapter 3, you'll find that he ends his letter exactly as he began it, with an exhortation again to grow in the grace and knowledge, he says, of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

[12:10] That begins and ends his letter. The responsibility that we have that comes with this high privilege of knowing God in Jesus Christ intimately, just as any apostle does.

Well, we have the responsibility, just as they do, of growing in that grace and knowledge. It's a responsibility of all who have the high privilege of that calling. So in chapter 1, verse 10, he says, be diligent to make your calling and election sure.

You've got a responsibility. All you ordinary, or should I say, extraordinary believers. And Peter's letter, you see, is concerned to tell us that whatever the last days of the world should bring, whatever uncertainties we may face, whatever the world or the flesh or the devil may throw at us, whatever may come to us, one thing must be absolutely certain about what these days will bring. It must be that these days bring growth of Christian people. That we are to grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whatever happens, that's what we've been to be doing. And so in his letter, he tells us how to grow as Christians and how to grow as churches in the face of hostility, in the face of the skepticism that we will certainly face increasingly in the last days.

[13:37] The chapter 3, verse 3 said, when we read it, scoffers will come, skeptics will come, people who scorn and abuse the truth of God in Christ. They'll be all around us, all the time.

And it won't just be from outside the church, Peter says, it'll be from inside the church. But nevertheless, your responsibility is to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's a terrible shock, isn't it, to think that our greatest opposition, our greatest hindrance to that growth might very well come, not from outside, but from inside the church of Jesus Christ.

Is that shocking to you? I think it's shocking to all of us, isn't it? But it wasn't a surprise to the apostle Peter. If you read through chapter 2, perhaps during the offering, you'll see the dreadful, the sober warnings that he gives us about exactly that.

It's always been that way, he says. We read chapter 2, verse 1. Just as it was then, false prophets, so it's going to be with you, false teachers. Even, he says, denying the master.

[14:50] Well, that's the tragedy of our own day, isn't it, in the West, in the Western church. Just the other week, I received our minister's forum. It's a monthly thing that comes out to all ministers.

And there was a letter there, I think it was a month ago, from a Church of Scotland minister, now retired, denying the deity of Christ. Saying that, in his view, reading the scriptures, the Lord Jesus never even considered himself to be God.

And as you can imagine, it started a great correspondence and dispute about all of that. I would want to say, by the way, that before anybody would listen to a man like that, they ought to look at whether his life was fruitful, as Peter says, or fruitless and ineffective.

I happen to know the church that he was minister of. He almost, but not quite, totally destroyed it. Almost. Happily, in the mercy of God, after he was put out of the way, God sent them a man who

preached the true gospel of grace.

And over the last ten or twelve years, that congregation has come to life and is flourishing. It is now a strong Bible church, in the mercy of God. But no thanks to his gospel.

[16:04] So also, it's one of the most wicked and disgraceful things that we're seeing in our own denomination today and in others, when leaders in Christ's church, instead of helping the weak, are putting stumbling blocks in their way.

Struggling Christians, Christians who are struggling, particularly with issues of sexual purity and temptation, seeking to honour the Lord Jesus Christ in their bodies and in their lives, are being told, no, don't struggle.

We affirm your sinful desires. Feel free to live any way you choose and we will accept you just the same and we'll bless you and we'll call you holy. Now that is shocking wickedness.

And all the more so if it's spoken by those who claim the authority of God. Well, Peter is very clear if you read chapter 2 what these people ought to be thinking and how they ought to be warned.

Look at chapter 2, verse 17, for example. Look what he says of these kind of people. These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them, the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.

[17:14] For speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping those who live in error. They promise them freedom but they themselves are slaves of corruption.

For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they escape the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.

It would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. Very strong words, aren't they?

A very strong warning from Peter, the apostle of Christ. Peter is very alert to these dangers, especially for young Christians. What is it that these so-called leaders, these teachers do?

Well, chapter 2, verse 14 tells us. They entice unsteady souls. Chapter 2, verse 18, as we read, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error.

[18:29] Those who are just learning what it means to live the Christian life are being enticed and their faith eroded and turned back to the way of the world. The untaught people, they're always the most vulnerable, aren't they?

And that's why young Christians, above all, they need strong and sound teaching from the scriptures, don't they? Not just singing, not just fellowship, not just all of those things, but teaching to root them firmly in the truth of God.

And that's why Peter is writing this letter. That's why he uses such plain language, brutal language even. He's writing not a theological treatise, not for nitpicking professors, but for plain, ordinary Christians like us, sitting in the pew.

So that he'll remind us of our great, great privilege in Christ, but also the great responsibility that we have to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

So come back to chapter 3, verse 1 then, and I want to concentrate on these first couple of verses here today. I'm stirring up your sincere minds, he says in verse 1, because you need to think straight if you're going to go on in grace and if you're going to grow in the knowledge of God.

[19:53] That word sincere, sincere mind, it means unalloyed, it means nothing false mixed in. I'm stirring up your sincere mind so there'll be nothing false, nothing unclear mixed in with your thinking.

Clear thinking, Peter is saying, is Christian thinking. And above all, clear thinking and Christian thinking will always be biblical thinking. You see that in verse 2.

To go on with God, to go forward in knowledge and grace, you must always be going back, says Peter, back to the scriptures, to the whole Bible, he says, the Old Testament, the predictions or the former words of the holy prophets, and the New Testament, the command of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles.

Isn't that striking? That's why he's written these two letters, primarily to stir them up, to remember that always, always, that they'll be going back to the whole Bible as a rock of authority and as a rock of sufficiency for all their thinking, for all their lives, for all their decision making.

Peter's saying that's so important for you to remember. And he's saying that because Peter knows that our enemy, the devil, is always trying to devour and to destroy Christ's people and Christ's church.

[ 21 : 23 ] Remember, he ends his first letter in 1 Peter chapter 5 by saying that. The devil is like a roaring lion waiting to see who he can devour and pounce on. He wants to destroy the spiritual life of Christian people.

He wants to erode away the spiritual life of Christian churches. And he wants to do it by breaking down God's means of communication with his people.

By breaking down the way that God speaks to us through his word. Now that's always, isn't it, how relationships are destroyed. Relationships that fall apart, they always fall apart because of communication breakdown.

That's what happens. One party just stops listening to the other or stops being able to communicate with the other. And that's why all counselling to restore relationships is built on restoring communication.

And the devil wants to destroy the life of the church by causing it to have a total communication breakdown with our Lord and Saviour. He wants us to reject or at least if he can't do that to make us forget about or just get confused about the word of God in Scripture.

[ 22 : 39 ] And that is the great problem in the Christian church in the West. That's the problem in the church, in our land, in our own denomination. There are a minority and it is a minority who utterly reject the truth of God in Scripture.

But there are many, many more, alas, who are confused totally about it or who have forgotten it. Why is that? Well, primarily it's because they never hear it in the pulpit.

That's why. How can they be expected to understand it and read it and cherish it in their own lives if they never hear it in the church? But that's the case. Our churches are full of people confused or forgetful or alas, even utterly rejecting the word of God in Scripture.

So let's get clear, absolutely clear, about Peter's command here, about the word of God in Scripture. About how we're to live in these last days of this world and to remember the word of God. That is the whole of the Old and the New Testament as a rock of stability in the church and as a rock of stability for our own Christian lives too. It can never be neglected, he says, if you and I are going to be fruitful and not unfruitful, stable and not unstable.

[ 23 : 59 ] The Bible must never be closed. It's got to be an open book in our churches and in our homes and in our personal lives too. The Scriptures alone are what gives us all that we need for life and godliness.

That's what he says. They are our authoritative key and our sufficient guide for living through the world's last days. So I want to think about those two things first. So first then, Peter is clear that the Bible is the authoritative key for every question in the church today.

Now we face all kinds of questions in the church today, don't we? The whole question of sexual morality and in particular homosexuality that's being faced at the moment in our own church and throughout all the world is just one of them.

The uniqueness of Christ is another question that's being faced, isn't it? Is Jesus really who he says he is? Is he the only way to know God? Dare we, for example, seek to evangelize and convert people of other religions, Jews or Sikhs or Muslims or whoever, as well as just atheists?

Dare we do that? Is Jesus really unique? And all kinds of other issues, all kinds of key questions that we're having to face up to in this, our pluralist world. Well, there are many voices around shouting out, aren't they, different things.

[ 25 : 27 ] There are many people saying that if the church is to make progress in the 21st century, it's got to be progressive. They say, well, of course, the Bible's still important, but it can't be authoritative now in the same way.

It can't certainly be just our sole authority. Especially within the church, people are saying that, don't they? They say things like this, oh, but the Holy Spirit is opening our eyes to more truth.

More light is, more light is being shed by the Spirit in our lives today to help us understand things.

And therefore, we must move on. Leave the Scriptures behind.

They can't be the sole authority anymore. Well, people may say that, but Peter, the apostle of Jesus Christ, says something very different.

Peter says that if you want to make progress for the cause of Christ in these last days on planet Earth, you must do something very different. He says that the way forward is always the way back. [ 26 : 33 ] The way back to the Scriptures. And that's the only way forward there is for our church life and also in our own personal Christian lives. Look at chapter 3, verse 2 again.

What is he calling us to remember? Remember the words of the Holy Prophets and the commands of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.

That's the way to growth and stability in the Christian faith. Look back at chapter 1, verses 13 and 14. This is where he expands really what he is summarizing in this one little verse in verse 2 of chapter 3.

Look at chapter 1, verses 13 and 14. I think it's right, says Peter, as long as I'm in this body to stir you up by way of reminder since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.

What he's saying is he knows he's going to die soon. And so he's writing to remind them, verse 15, so that after he dies they will remember these things.

[ 27 : 46 ] I make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. Well, what are these things? These things are the absolute authority of the scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

If we read on from verse 16 you'll see that he expands on both of these things. First of all, the New Testament, the words of the apostles. Look at verse 16. For we, the apostles, did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was born to him by the majestic glory, this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. We ourselves heard this very voice born from heaven for we were with him on the holy mountain.

Unlike the false teachers, unlike the progressives, the words of the apostles are not clever myths. They are not distortions of the truth.

They are not secret heresies. That's the mark of the false teacher. Their teaching is shaped by a desire to have a certain lifestyle. That's very plain in chapter 2.

[ 29 : 08 ] Their greed shapes their message this chapter 2 verse 3. In greed they'll exploit you.

Their sexual desires shape their message verse 2. They will follow their sensuality and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.

It says the same thing in chapter 3 verse 3. It's essential desires that shape their message. They want to live a certain way and do certain things and therefore they shape their theology accordingly. But not so, says Peter, for the apostles.

Our witness is true. We, he says, were eyewitnesses of his majesty. And that means, friends, that faith in the apostolic word is never a leap into the dark.

It's never just blind faith in something that is a fairy tale or something we hope might be true. That is absolutely not what the word faith means in scripture. It is reasoned trust in the honest word of honest men who saw with their very own eyes the majesty of God in Christ in his ministry and in his resurrection.

They were eyewitnesses. And verse 17 says, they were eyewitnesses. They heard the voice of God himself in the majestic glory saying, this is my son.

[ 30 : 27 ] Listen to him. And they did listen to him. They heeded him. And that's why the apostles' words faithfully bear the command of our Lord Jesus Christ directly to us today.

It comes through the apostles and their gospel in the New Testament scriptures. Now that's so important as well because again you might hear people saying, ah but but let's get back to Jesus. Our teacher in the church is Jesus not the apostles. But notice in chapter 3 verse 2 Jesus speaks his commands through your apostles.

I remember reading Chris Patton's autobiography. Do you remember Chris Patton who once was chairman of the Tory party I think it was and then he was made the governor of Hong Kong the last governor of Hong Kong.

And he related a conversation that the then Prime Minister John Major had with him when he was being appointed to Hong Kong and said something like this. I forget the exact words but this was the gist of it.

[ 31 : 31 ] When the Chinese government or whoever you're speaking to hear you speak they hear me speak. That's what John Major said to Chris Patton.

That's what it meant to be the governor of Hong Kong. He spoke the commands of the British Prime Minister. And that's what the apostles speak to us with all that authority.

The commands of the Lord and Saviour are spoken to us through your apostles. The New Testament scriptures therefore are the authoritative key to answer every single question that the church might face today or tomorrow or any other day.

Because it's the authoritative word of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But not just the New Testament scriptures says Peter so also the Old Testament.

Look at chapter 1 verse 19. We have something more sure he says the prophetic word to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

[ 32 : 45 ] Knowing this first of all that no prophecy of scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

You see the false teachers the so-called progressives their teachings are driven by their essential desires. They have to shape doctrine that will match their behavior and justify their behavior.

But the prophetic word of God never ever came that way says Peter. Never from man's desires or thoughts. Men spoke from God as they were carried along driven along by the Holy Spirit.

That word carried along or driven is a very strong word. It's used in Acts chapter 27 verse 15.

Remember when Paul was on that ship being driven ahead by the winds so that even if they wanted to they couldn't possibly change course.

So it is with the word of God spoken through his prophets. Jesus is saying for the church to be progressive in the biblical sense for the church to stay alive never mind to grow and to be strong in the face of skepticism in the face of opposition for the church to be progressive it must always be going back back to the sole authoritative key in the scriptures of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

[ 34 : 22 ] The words of the prophets driven along by God and the words of the apostles delivering to us the command of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ delivering to us once for all as Jude put it the faith of the church.

The scriptures alone are the key to unlock the truth of every question that we'll face in the church today and every question that we'll face until the end of time. There will never be a time when we need to move on and find a different authority.

And therefore any church or any leader purporting to be a Christian leader or a teacher who seeks to undermine or erode away that truth is not apostolic, is not orthodox.

But according to Peter, the apostle of Jesus is a false teacher. Often it's Paul, of course, who's the victim, isn't it? People say that. We don't listen to Paul.

Paul's not our leader, it's Jesus. But Peter himself answers precisely that question, doesn't he?

Look at chapter 3, verse 16 and 17. He's speaking about Paul. There are some things in his letters, he says, that are hard to understand.

[ 35 : 34 ] What do people do? The ignorant and the unstable twist them to their own destruction as they do the other scriptures notice. You, therefore, knowing this beforehand, take care you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.

Don't be destabilized. Recognize the error of lawless people and be sure instead of true apostolic authority. What are we to do instead, verse 18?

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Well, how are we to do that? Well, briefly then, Peter's second main point in his letter about the importance of scriptures is exactly that, isn't it?

Not only are the scriptures the authoritative key to every question for the church today, but the Bible also is the sufficient guide for all Christian growth, for all Christian fruitfulness.

It's not just the Bible's authority that's under attack today, of course, it's its sufficiency. There are those who accept the Bible's authority, but in reality, they'll say, well, to make progress in the Christian life, to go on with a fuller relationship with Christ, a fuller experience of God, you have to turn elsewhere.

[ 36 : 55 ] Maybe to particular spiritual experiences, or types of music, or worship, or special blessings, or whatever it might be. No, no, no, says Peter. His whole letter is about growth in grace and in a personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not just a letter about refruited error. That's important. It is that, but it's not only that. It's all so that ordinary Christians like you and me can grow into an ever deeper relationship with the Lord Jesus, our Savior.

That's what we just read there in that last verse. And what he's saying is that that happens as you resist the error of unbiblical thinking. And as you grow in the true knowledge imparted and brought to you straight through the light of biblical revelation.

How do we grow in life and godliness? What do we need? I'll go back to chapter 1 and verse 3 again. His divine power, he says, has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

Everything we need for life and godliness, the NIV puts it. All we need for that growth we have. Where do we have it? Verse 4. In the great and precious promises that we find in scripture.

[ 38 : 18 ] scripture. These are the things that lead us to be partakers of the divine nature. The promises of God written in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

Do you see why Peter wants us to keep on reading them? To keep on living in the word of God in scripture? Because it is the sufficient guide. It will shape our lives.

It will draw us on. It will help us. And it's the only way to help us. to fulfill our whole calling of why God called us in the first place. To share in the eternal glory of God in Christ.

The scriptures are full of these great and precious promises. They're God's sufficient resource given us to the very end of the world that we might grow in grace, that we will not be unfruitful but we might rather bear great fruit for his name.

So Peter says devote yourselves to them. Make every effort to add to your faith virtue and knowledge and steadfastness and godliness and brotherly affection and love he says.

[ 39 : 26 ] Grow in grace and in the knowledge of God through the power of the scriptures that work in your lives. That's how it happens. And then you'll be effective and you'll be fruitful in the knowledge of God our Saviour.

That's what we want to be surely isn't it? As Christian people. We want to be effective. We want to be fruitful for Jesus. I hope we do.

Well we can't be says Peter and we won't be without growth. And we won't have that growth unless we have the right kind of feeding. Nothing so disappointing is there as a plant in your garden that just doesn't produce any flowers.

Or maybe it's a fruit bush. It just doesn't produce any fruit. Last year I was given as a present some gardening tokens and I bought two lovely magnolias and we planted them in the garden. And you know it looked lovely in the garden centre.

It was covered in flowers. Do you know what I've got this year between my two magnolias? One flower. One pathetic flower. Why is that?

[ 40 : 36 ] Well I strongly suspect having read the books books. It's because I've been too busy to tend to them. I haven't fed them. I haven't fed them with the right stuff. In fact as a matter of fact I haven't fed them with any stuff.

So there's a little bit of growth of leaf and all that but nothing that matters. No flowers. Not the right kind of growth. On the other hand my roses. I've got high hopes for my roses because last year I went out to visit my friend Edward Lobb and I came home with eight bags of well-rotted chicken dung.

And once I got over the abuse from the family for the state of the smell in the car I was out in the gardens and all my roses have been wonderfully treated with the finest manure that money can buy.

So I'm hoping for a very good year for my roses this year. But you see it takes the right kind of feeding doesn't it? It takes the right kind of food. Just like our bodies.

You're not going to become an Olympic athlete if you live on fish suppers and coke are you? And so Peter says so it is with you. We live in difficult days.

[ 41 : 43 ] Dark days. There are darker days ahead for the church of Jesus Christ in this land friends I fear. And there will be great pressures.

Not least from the scoffers. The skeptics that Peter tells us about within the professing church. church. They will seek to turn us away from the one true source of feeding of nourishment and

growth that we have.

The word of God in scripture. The great and precious promises. That's what they'll do. And that's why I've written says Peter. I don't want you to lose your stability.

I don't want you to be carried away by the error of lawless people. I want you to stand firm. And not just to stand. To grow. And to be a faithful and a fruitful people of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember and cherish and trust and obey the word of God written for you in your Bibles is Peter's word to us. I wonder if we do cherish our Bibles in that way today.

[ 42 : 50 ] I wonder if we've just had it so easy for so long that we take it all for granted. Friends, we never know what the future will hold. Look what happened in China.

Just a few short years, a land that was once a free place with freedom of religion became totally shut down. Bibles were banned.

Christians were flung into prison. You and I ready for that? Don't think that that could never happen here. Nobody thought that could happen in China. I believe it's entirely possible.

Some of us might live to see that in our own country. Is this your most precious possession and mine?

Is it the one thing that if you had to lose everything you would not want to lose? That's the question. I remember reading about a Chinese pastor imprisoned during the time of the Cultural Revolution.

[ 43 : 57 ] And his duty in the prison camp, among others, was to clean the latrines in the staff quarters. And as he was cleaning the toilets one day, he saw that the soldiers in the camp had been using as toilet paper pages of Bibles that they'd confiscated.

And such was his hunger for the Word of God that he picked these filthy pages out of the latrines and cleaned them up as best he could and took them home to his cell and treasured them.

Because to him the great and precious promises contained in them was worth more than anything else. He so prized it.

He read it day by day because he was hungry for the Word of Life, hungry for the Word that would give him everything he needed for life and godliness, even as a prisoner in a dreadful prison camp in China under the communists.

Because above all, this was the way to have a deep and a growing and a wonderful personal relationship with his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

[ 45 : 08 ] Christ. Don't underestimate how deadly serious Peter's words are for us in the church in the West today. Listen again.

I'm stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder that you should remember the predictions of the Holy Prophets and the commandment of our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

knowing this, first of all, that scoffers will come in the last day with scoffing. Remember the scriptures, says Peter.

Remember your Bibles and so grow in the knowledge of him who called us into his own glory and excellence. Friends, we will keep standing and we will keep going forward as Christian believers and as a Christian church only as long as we never stop going back to the word of God in Scripture. Amen. And may God help us so to stand. We're going to stand.