

II. APPEALS THAT ARE LINKED WITH THE PERILS OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD: 4:7-5:11

For Christians who are beset and beleaguered there are hazards. There are, to use the bishop's word, "pitfalls". In bitter experience Peter had found this for himself. He would therefore sound an alert.

Remember this, he writes, "THE END OF ALL THINGS IS AT HAND" (v. 7). Theologians use the word "eschatology" when they wish to speak of things future and final: death, the Lord's return, judgment, heaven and hell. The eschatology of the New Testament is a fascinating thing to study, holding far more wonders than most Christians realize who read only the books on prophecy of one school of thought. As with matters of election or sanctification, Holy Scripture is written with an enormously fertile freedom, untrammelled by the often denuding exactitudes of theories and schemes that men *will* impose on what is revealed.

One thing on which the New Testament insists is that the "end" in God's purposes is both a *termination* and a *consummation*. Nor does it occur in what we call a "day"—a 24-hour span. It occurs in one of God's "times", answering the Greek word *chairoi*, which means a time of importance, of crucial significance. Within it, to be sure, may be particular moments of events and occurrence, as when "suddenly" the heavenly chorus was heard by the shepherds at Bethlehem or when "suddenly" the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost. Acknowledging such a circumstance, however, does not alter the point that God's endings and beginnings are of the nature of crucial processes, not simply momentary flashes.

Thus, for example, from one point of view the "end" of the dispensation that we know as the Old Testament, or Old Covenant, began when Jesus, the Messiah and Saviour, in the fullness of time, came to our world. From another point of view it came to an end when he died upon the Cross, with the words "It is finished" upon his lips, and the veil of the temple was

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ALERTED AGAINST DANGER

The life of the individual Christian," says Bishop Stephen Neil, "will always be marked by conflict and temptation. Each age, each stage of life, has its own problems, its own pitfalls, its own subtle occasions of failure. It is usually supposed that youth is the period of most dangerous temptation. I would rather say it is the time of the most obvious temptation. The besetting weakness of middle age is self-complacency and unadventurous acceptance of things as they are. The besetting weakness of old age is an unwillingness to accept the fact of being old . . . an inner querulousness about life as God has made it, self-pity, a kind of resentment against the young . . . and a consequent refusal to see any good in anything that is new."

He then goes on to remark that "the existence of all these possibilities of failure is a reminder, if any reminder is still needed, that Christian holiness involves an ever-repeated self-commitment to the exacting demands of the holiness of God in ever-changing situations".¹

The mood in which the bishop writes is precisely the mood of the Apostle Peter in the concluding section of his letter, to which we now turn.

As all the way along, he is still exhorting, still pleading, still counselling. It might be added that there is some repetition of things already mentioned. Having followed him through those appeals that are linked pre-eminently with the *privileges* of the people of God and those that are linked with the *practices* of the people of God, we are ready for the final cycle of entreaties.

¹ Stephen Neil, *Christian Holiness* (Lutterworth Press, London: 1960), pp. 104, 105.

