Papers on the Coming of the Lord

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The Day of the Lord

“Now, we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand” (2 Thess. 2:1, 2).

I showed last night the importance of not confounding the day of the Lord with the promise of His coming. On the other hand, we must take care also of confounding the coming of the Lord with His day here spoken of. That is, we must keep each separate; each in its own distinctness. The coming of the Lord, I have endeavoured to show, will be the consummation of the Lord’s grace. The day of the Lord will be the execution of the Lord’s judgment. Hence, if we mix up the coming of the Lord with His day, we weaken the solemnity of judgment, just as if we mix up the day with the coming we lose all the freshness and fulness of His grace. In short, grace and judgment must each have their due expression, and as the coming of the Lord Jesus is that which Scripture employs to express the Lord’s return to earth to receive His own people and present them arrayed in His glory in the Father’s house on high, so the day of the Lord embraces His intervention with men on earth, putting down all the pride, malice, and unbelief of men, and bringing in a new system of divine government, where all things shall be subjected to His authority. I do not say all men converted, but all men brought under His rule. There will be a feigned obedience rendered during that day of the kingdom here below. You cannot be surprised that it should be so,

because not only will there be a spared remnant of men at the beginning of that day of the Lord, but its course will embrace not less than a thousand years, and during that long period of unbroken prosperity, with every mark of divine goodness lavished upon the men that are living here below, there will be millions of persons born to those who were spared from the beginning. Of these millions Scripture nowhere teaches that they will be born of God. They may or they may not be, but even those that are not born of God will have no longer the evil to contend with that man has now. No more will there be want; no more oppression; no more the temptation to open wickedness; no more wars or fightings; no more disease or pestilence; no more Satan even allowed to tempt men, for he will be under restraint during the whole of that time.

You who read the Scriptures cannot be ignorant of these things; and, happily, in this country, at any rate, most men read the Bible, and you must know that I am referring to plain positive Scripture in what I have been saying. The Bible is an open book in Scotland, and the children learn to read it, even though sometimes their elders do not explain it to them as it might be looked for. But there it is, and in very plain terms in the last book of the New Testament. Further, it is quite a mistake to suppose that it is only the last book of the New Testament which speaks of that day. On the contrary, all the Old Testament prophets are full of it, though they do not define it as a period of a thousand years. This was hidden from them. It awaited a prophet still greater than they. It was suitable in God’s wisdom that John the Evangelist should be also John the Prophet, and that he should remove the veil off those times and seasons

which the Lord would not allow His disciples to occupy themselves with when He was going up to heaven. It was enough for them to know, not the times and seasons of the redemption of Israel, but that now God the Father was about to accomplish the promise of the Holy Ghost, and to make them witnesses for Jesus throughout all the earth; and this is going on now. Witnessing to the Lord Jesus by the Holy Ghost is now proceeding. That is what we commonly call the gospel, and very rightly. But along with the gospel you must always remember there goes the church — the gospel being the testimony of God to every creature, and the church being the gathering together of those that receive the gospel and acknowledge the Lord Jesus, baptized by one Spirit into that which is called in Scripture the body of Christ.

Now, I have a little to say in explaining this matter more fully — that is, the day of the Lord; and I shall still keep up the contrast between the coming of the Lord and the day of the Lord, because as to these the most important point is that you should be clear about your own position as believers; that you should know your own portion in the day of grace. The coming of the Lord Jesus to make good all that His love has secured to faith is of prime importance. The day of the Lord, although it be of great interest in a positive way, is, as far as we are concerned, more negative, and we must not mix up the bearings of judgment with the dealings of grace, if we would avoid serious dishonour to the truth. This confusion was evidently a danger from the beginning. Here we see it in these verses — “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and [by] our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by

letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand." The word "by" has no business there at all. It is printed in italics to show you that it is not in the original, but there is even more than that: the original excludes the word, and, therefore, it was really a mistake on the part of our translators to introduce it. The particular form of phrase employed by the Holy Ghost brackets the two ideas, and makes them to be one connected whole. The coming of our Lord Jesus and our gathering are the two parts of one great transaction. Now, if you bring in the word "by," it separates them, instead of combining them together. It is remarkable that the translators, who were real scholars, should have overlooked the point; but any person to whom it is pointed out, who knows the Greek language, will see in an instant what I mean. It is one of the peculiarities of that language that one article is used when it is intended to bring in two things. If they mean to separate the two, they bring in a second article. There is no second article in this case. For instance, where it is said "Our God and Father" there is one article used, because the same person that is God is also Father, and in order to combine the two the one article is used.

This, however, is by the way, but it strengthens what I have already referred to, that the translation of the Christians that are now here below, as well as of the Old Testament saints, is the necessary and immediate consequence of our Lord's presence in the air. The moment He comes all that are His instantly rise in a changed or glorified state to meet Him on high, and these two events are bound up together in the one phrase. Thus the force of the first verse is this: We beseech you by your blessed hope, by that which is full of comfort and joy — His presence to gather you to

Himself on high — do not be alarmed by the false rumour that the day of the Lord has already come. It has not come, and it cannot come until certain terrible evils are accomplished, which are future.

Now, you must carefully notice that the apostle does not say that the Lord cannot come first. That “day” it was on which they were so entirely mistaken. To use a vulgar phrase, the cart was put before the horse. That is to say, they put the day of the Lord before the coming of the Lord, whereas the apostle implies that the true relation of these events is the Lord’s coming first of all, not to be occupied with His enemies, but to assemble His saints in His presence. He has a much nearer object. He has a loved object. The first thing the Lord does when He comes from heaven is instantly to gather to Himself all that are waiting for Him. We must always bear in mind that all children of God are supposed to wait for Him. Don’t allow yourselves the thought that persons who may be somewhat unenlightened about it do not wait for the coming of the Lord. The truth of it is, that all saints do so more or less, though some of them have got erroneous notions. Some suppose that there must be intervals and terrible events between the present and the coming of the Lord; others suppose that there will be a long period of blessedness. They are both untrue.

Let me tell you, however, that what is commonly said by some to be the coming of the Lord (namely, when the Lord takes His place on the great white throne to judge all the dead) is not the coming of the Lord at all. If you look at the twentieth chapter of Revelation, you will see it is not His coming. When you talk about the Lord’s coming, you ought to mean that the Lord is coming back here — coming from whence He has gone. This is the

true meaning of it — He that is absent will be present. We are not told where the great white throne will be, and the reason we are not is very simple. Always in judging of distance we naturally judge from the earth, where we are. Such is the point from which all distance is naturally measured by man. It follows necessarily from his situation, and quite rightly so. Now, when the great white throne of judgment is set, the heavens and earth that now are will have completely passed away. There will be, for the time, a total dissolution both of heaven and earth.

There can be no question of coming in that case. There will be everlasting judgment. All the dead shall go and stand before the great white throne, but where that is, no man can tell. Only God knows. The reason is, that the heavens that now are, vanish, and the earth likewise, and where it is, it is impossible to say. Its elements will be in space somewhere, and we can perfectly understand that, when the wicked dead stand before the Judge of all, it is not of the least importance to say where. We know also the accompanying fact, that the heavens that now are will have completely disappeared. Therefore it is too late to speak of coming. The coming of the Lord must be before this universe disappears. That is plain; and it is what every one who speaks about the coming of the Lord must mean. He who once came in humiliation is coming again in glory; not said to be coming to the new heavens and the new earth, although I have no doubt He will be there also; but this is not what is meant by the expression, the coming of the Lord.

All creeds acknowledge that Christ will come to judge the quick and the dead, and that the heavens must receive Him till the times of the restitution of all things.

This means that everything that is now groaning will be put right; that this poor world, which is now a scene of travail and sorrow, will be changed; and that this mighty change will be brought about by the intervention of the Lord in power, not by the nostrums of men. All the physic that learned men might give the world would not make a bit of difference on the earth, nor would it change the nature of the race. This mighty change is to be effected by a greater than man, and the greater One is the Redeemer. That is essentially to be the glory of the Lord Jesus. Even the Holy Ghost will not effect that change. The Holy Ghost did not become incarnate; nor did He suffer for our sins. It is the Saviour who is to be glorified in the sight of all men — not merely in heaven, but on earth. Now is the Christianity that is founded upon the cross. The Lord is now glorified, and we, who walk by faith and not by sight, enter into that. Unbelievers in this day know nothing about God; nothing about themselves; nothing about God's Son. I do not upbraid them; God forbid. I feel most deeply for their carelessness, prejudices, and guilt, because if any man reads the Word of God he will find there the most powerful body of testimony to its truth. It is not merely the reasonings of men. These will never really satisfy the soul — can never set one heart right. Christ alone can do this by the power of His redemption; by His infinite love; by grace and truth, by a life of holiness and righteousness. There is no other object that one's heart can rest on. Even the wisest king that has ever lived became a fool at last. I know no person in a more pitiful position than old king Solomon giving in to the follies of his Egyptian wife, of his 700 wives, and 300 concubines. That is a sad and evil history, and yet Solomon was the son of the great king David. We want great David's

greater Son. That greater Son is the Lord Jesus; the true Son of David, the one specific for the good of men; the only One that shows the perfection of holiness, but who nevertheless died that He might win the most unholy to God. There is the Person to transport the heart and bind it for ever to the God which it had hitherto traduced. We had thought Him some hard taskmaster, and people talk very often to the great dishonour of God. They think it an awful thing that God should condemn a man for eating a thing so small as an apple. This is not the true way to put it. Adam sold God for such a small thing as an apple. Is not this the humbling truth? It is Adam giving up God — the woman first, I am sorry to say. She worked upon him through his affections; the man would not be severed from her even in sin. It is well when a man is not too proud to follow his wife in what is good — sometimes they do not; but to follow a wife or anybody in what is bad is a sad piece of folly as well as sin. Therefore, one wants not merely God to show Himself as He is in grace to all man's wickedness, but God in the person of a man, the Son of man that God might be glorified thereby.

All the talk of those who love to speak about the perfection of man and the glory of man is put to shame by the name of Jesus, because, after all, what does their talk come to? They are great on the theory of evolution. They think their fathers had been monkeys at one time, but all that, I need not say, is as contrary to the truth of God as it is contrary to all science, because nobody ever saw the leg of a monkey merge into the leg of a man. There is nothing of the sort in any fossil remains, not to speak of present phenomena. All true science goes upon fixed principles and observed facts. No doubt there are

variations of species. Everyone knows and fully allows that. There may be a very wide variety in every species, but still you never find one species turning into another. Nobody ever met an apple that was becoming a pear. Is it not an extraordinary thing that clever men should produce such fancies as science?

Returning to our subject, here we have the apostle exhorting from the blessed motive of hope, and telling the Thessalonians that they should not be alarmed by the false fear.

And let me tell you that a favourite weapon of the devil in injuring God's people lies in fear. Very likely he draws them into something wrong first. He entices men, perhaps, into sin. That is one fault; and then he distracts and overthrows their conscience, and makes them judge God according to their own notion of what they deserve. On the other hand, he works also by falsehood, and makes even the believer stand in doubt of God. But his great weapon, in many ways, has always been terror. What is the weapon of God? What is His way of drawing men from Satan's power, and from evil of every kind? Faith — not fear; faith of God's grace and truth as revealed in His Son; not only in the person, but in the infinite work of the Saviour. His person alone would not suffice. But, on the other hand, His work could not have sufficed without His person. I am not called to worship grace, but to worship Him who died upon the tree. It is an easy thing to slip away from the truth, and turn the work of the Lord into an object of idolatry, as we see in the Roman Catholic system, where the Lord's Supper is converted into one of the most hideous forms of idolatry. One can understand that men should get on by slow degrees to idolise a wafer. One might reason about it, of

course, as being almost incredible, but there is the fact. Our forefathers all worshipped it; all Christendom worshipped it once, with a very slight exception — a thin line of witnesses whom the Lord raised up, but who, for the most part, were spoken of as the vilest of the earth; and remember it was not merely bad men who persecuted them. The best of the Popes encouraged the persecution of the Waldensians. Through their vain traditions and their unholy prejudices they really played a most evil part in persecuting these true children of God who stood up against that corrupt woman — that great city Babylon.

As the enemy works by fear, the Lord does by faith. You see that is exactly what is brought out in these verses. What is the great object of hope in the words before us? It is the coming of the Lord. Behind His coming to take us up to heaven I see dark clouds and coals of fire. I see that the wrath of the Lord is to break forth — for let us not forget the wrath of the Lamb. But, surely, we must not mix these things up together, and make a mere medley of grace and judgment. This is precisely what faith disentangles. Faith lays hold of Christ as the true object of the Christian's hope. Judgment is for unbelievers. Never allow the thought that a man is not responsible for his unbelief. Grace gives a man faith to believe; but a man is truly responsible for his unbelief. He knows very well that he is fighting against the Word of God.

Take, for instance, those men who say that there never was such a character as the Lord Jesus Christ; never anything so humble, so loving, so holy, so sublime. I admit freely and entirely that if the Lord Jesus was not the Only-begotten Son of God He was not holy or

sublime. People who tell lies are not very admirable folk; and I say if Christ was not God He was not good, because it is impossible that One who was good should pretend to be other and better than He was. Now, the Lord Jesus Christ does constantly leave the impression upon the soul, indirectly as well as directly, that He was God. Take, for instance, these words “Before Abraham was, I am.” Before Abraham came into being I am — not “I came into being.” He was the self-subsistent One before Abraham was in existence. Abraham was born; the Son of God never began to be the Son of God. He was born as man; the Word was made flesh, but He was the Only-begotten and the Eternal One before He ever came into the world. That is what lies at the very bottom of all truth as to Christ; and, therefore, if persons object to this and try to overthrow it, just look at the insult to God. Think what God feels about the rejection of His infinite love — of the One that all heaven worships! Think of poor puny men pouring contempt upon the Lord!

I suppose there never was a time in the history of the world when so many respectable baptised persons rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not so very long ago since a Bishop on the other side of the Tweed preached a sermon urging the Jews to become Christians; and a clever Jew replied to his Lordship, telling him that it was a very inopportune moment to ask the Jews to become Christians, when so many Christians were ceasing to be Christians. This was a very painful thing to hear; but I am afraid the Bishop could not well get out of the scrape. That is, he could not fairly deny the fact that many nominal Christians are abandoning nominal Christianity, particularly among educated men. I daresay

the working men of England are rather disposed in that way too, at least they were some time ago. But on the opposite hand, the teachers, the barristers, the medical men, and the clergy have shown them a remarkably bad example. Why do I say this? Just that we may, at any rate, have the truth before us and not be left in a foolish paradise of our own ideas; that we may truly realise the solemnity of the present moment, and that we may personally cleave to the truth with full purpose of heart. The truth is found inseparable from Christ.

That which the Holy Spirit brings up to meet the lie of Satan is the truth. Faith lays hold of the truth, and the truth as to this matter is that Christ Himself is coming to gather all that are His to meet Him on high, changed into His glorious likeness. The apostle presents that hope to neutralise the fear of the “day.” The fear which the evil one was creating amongst the Thessalonians was that the day of the Lord was come. Perhaps many of you recollect the time when a person in America named Miller produced a fearful condition of things. He pretended to fix the date when the day of judgment was coming — the day of the Lord on the earth — and the consequence was that numbers of persons gave up their business, shut up their shops, abandoned their farms — they were chiefly persons in that class of life. The day came, but there was no such thing as the day of the Lord; and it was not merely that the faith of the great mass of the people was shaken to its centre, or that a good many lost their businesses and were ruined, but numbers of them from the shock lost their reason. That, however, was not at all a new thing in the world. In the year 1000 there was a great time of alarm. Ignorant people thought that there was a fatal charm in the word

thousand, and, according to the reckoning of the doctors, they were taught that the day of the Lord would be then. The day came and passed, and there was no appearance of the day of the Lord. Before that time, in the year 600, there had been another but perhaps milder shock of that kind of earthquake. These all passed away, and what was the effect? People got hardened more and more in unbelief. Why was this? Because it was not the truth. They had no right to talk about the day of the Lord in that way. They were puzzled and alarmed about the day of the Lord, because they did not realise the apostle's motive of comfort in the coming of the Lord.

There is a true order of events. The Lord is coming — that is the first thing — coming to gather His own together; and, therefore, they need not trouble themselves about the alarming cry that the day of the Lord was there, for even, when it does come, it will not affect them. It will fall upon those that know not God, and those that obey not the gospel.

I may direct the attention of any of you who wish to understand the subject to the chapter before this. You will find that there is a most careful preparation for the due understanding of the day of the Lord. The apostle presents the truth to them in the previous chapter, showing that they were quite mistaken in their anticipations of the nature of that day, because they feared that it would fall upon the saints. Not at all. When that day comes, you will arrive with it. Who, then, are the people that will have trouble in that day? The people who are troubling you now — your persecutors. The day of the Lord is a day of trouble, not for God's people, but for God's enemies. They were all wrong in their

thoughts, and he sets them right about the nature of the thing before he brings in the elaborate refutation in the second chapter.

I now turn to this, for it is very full of spiritual instruction for our souls. Observe, first of all, the careful preparation of the ground, and, secondly, the careful setting right of the heart. “We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of the Lord” — that is the motive for the sake of (ὑπέρ) which he entreats them. It is not the subject-matter that troubled them. Here the Revisers of the New Testament have done harm, I think, because their version connects the coming of the Lord with the day of the Lord. They take it to be the subject of which he is speaking in the first verse; but it is not. It is the motive against the rumour, the fear of which had taken possession of and troubled them. Clearly the “day of the Lord” is the subject, and the coming of the Lord Jesus is the motive of comfort against the false representation and the fear that it was come. To confound the two is fatal; and I have no doubt it was that which led to the mistranslation, and to the day of the Lord being understood to be “at hand,” and not to have actually come, as the heterodox said.

I remember glancing at a book by a certain Regius Professor of Greek upon the Epistles to the Thessalonians. You would expect a Greek Professor of Oxford to understand Greek; but the extraordinary thing was that he continued the same mistranslation as is in the Authorised Version. There is no ground to doubt that the closing verb means “is present,” not “at hand:” an error alike of rendering and of doctrine, which would contradict the apostle’s own teaching in Rom. 13:12, that the day is at hand. Certainly the false teachers did

not anticipate what the apostle taught; they pretended to have his authority for saying that the day was come, to the alarm of the Thessalonians. There is no just reason for questioning the regular sense. What is now admitted by every Greek scholar worth consulting eluded the Professor. How do you account for that? People go to the New Testament with their own ideas of what it ought to be, instead of to receive what God says. This is the way that people do when they rise up against the plainest truths that are in the Bible. It is because their minds are preoccupied. They have got a certain pre-conceived idea, and because of this they make the greatest blunders. Remember I do not say that the person who is addressing you is not liable to as great a blunder. I am sure we all are if we go to the Bible in that spirit. You will not, therefore, suppose I mean to speak disrespectfully of any person, but to press positive facts. We ought to have far more homage for the truth than for persons. I do not understand a man writing to keep back the truth. It may seem a wonderful thing to find a person who has the just reputation of being a scholar misinterpreting plain Greek. But he did so; and it was entirely owing to the fact that he had got a system in his mind which falsified his views of Scripture and the translation of Scripture. The only way in which a man can get rid of that is when, by grace delivered from prejudice, he looks to the Lord and approaches Scripture with the desire to learn what God says.

The apostle, having given the motive of comfort why they should not be agitated about this report which had so alarmed them, lets them know that the people who had spread that report were no better than they should be, because they had actually given out a letter of their

own as if it were a letter of the apostle's! You must not suppose that it is his First Epistle they had misinterpreted. What he says is — "That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us." He does not say it was his letter. If he had referred to the First Epistle, he would have said, the letter from us. He would have referred to it as a well-known letter. If he had referred to it vaguely, it might have been any letter, but he would not have said "as from us." but ours. What he meant was that it pretended to be what it was not. The worst morality is shown particularly in implying what is not true was inspired. Forging is a great sin. It was not merely that they pretended to a revelation, or to a word spoken in the assembly, but they really pretended it was Paul's letter. When the truth is lost, how often men cease to be truthful!

And now the apostle goes into the facts of evil, which must precede the day which is to judge them. He says — "Let no man deceive you by any means; for [that day shall not come] except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." I do not recollect the Revised Version, but I have no doubt you will find it is "the falling away," which is the regular word for the apostasy. It is not merely an indeterminate expression — "a" falling, as in the Authorised Version. Next, the man of sin. The apostasy referred to what was already known among the Christians and even among the Jews. In the eleventh of Daniel we hear of a king that should do according to his own will, that was to come by-and-bye; and this king is described in very characteristic colouring. He rejects false gods, he refuses his father's god, he would not have what is

called the desire of Israel, that is, the Messiah; and he rejects the true God. Yet, for all that, he falls a victim to a god of his own device. Like Jeroboam, he sets up a new religion in order to accomplish political ends. It is not merely an ambitious prelate who sets himself up — this would be bad enough — but it is one who claims the honour due to God. He makes no hypocritical pretence to be a servant of His servants. He claims for himself supreme and exclusive divine worship in the temple of God.

I think that it is unjust to say that this has ever yet been realised to the full. I have as bad an opinion of Popery, I suppose, as anybody here; but I do not believe that Popery is the apostasy. The apostasy is a great deal more, and a great deal worse. I believe that a man might be saved who is a Roman Catholic; I believe, in the midst of the terrible corruption and superstition of the Romish Church, there is enough of the word of God read, enough of Christ, for a poor soul to lay hold of the great truth of a Divine Person who became man and died for sinners. Hence, I believe that there have been not only Roman Catholic laymen, but Roman Catholic priests saved, and, what is more, Roman Catholic Popes. I believe Pope Leo was a good man (although he was ambitious), as also Pope Gregory the First. Alas, Gregory the Seventh was a very different man. I only refer to these as two occurring to me that seem to have strewn a fear of God and a love of His truth in the midst of abounding darkness and superstition. We must not allow ourselves to be carried away too strongly by controversy. We must bear in mind that there are persons who may be objects of divine grace under most untoward circumstances. I can conceive of a Roman

Catholic being saved, but who can conceive of a Unitarian being saved? The latter denies the divinity and atonement of Christ. Indeed, anyone who denies even the true humanity of the Lord is worse than a Roman Catholic. The falling away or apostasy means the rejection of all revealed truth.

The apostle then tells us that the day of the Lord cannot come until the apostasy, and the revelation of “the man of sin.” That is perfectly plain. The Lord told Abram, as a reason for not judging the Amorites, that the cup of their iniquity was not yet full. The cup of Sodom and Gomorrah was filled, as we know, but that of the Amorites was not. They were allowed to follow their evil courses until the earth was ready to spue them out, and then the sword of retribution fell upon them at God’s command. It is always a principle in God’s dealings that the iniquity which He judges must be thoroughly out. The lawlessness of Christendom is not thoroughly open. There is still, in the midst of a great deal that is very sad, a great deal of conversion going on. There is also not a little of devotedness to Christ. The forms and the reality of truth are yet apparent, and it is as yet “the mystery of lawlessness.” It will be a totally different thing in that day.

Thus we come to what I am now to dwell on — that from the coming of the Lord differs the day of the Lord, not only in character but in time. There is an interval between. How long that interval is must be learned from other scriptures, where the times and the seasons are taken up — namely, in the Book of Revelation. Where would you look for prophetic seasons so readily as in that book? What do you find in it, looking at it as a whole? You have the epistles to the seven churches,

giving a prophetic view of the church as long as she should be here below; and at the end of the last of the seven churches — the church of Laodicea — a door is opened in heaven, and the prophet is permitted to look in, and he sees a new company in heaven, never, in fact, seen there before — twenty-four elders round the central throne of God, themselves seated on thrones.

Who are these crowned elders? In my judgment they are symbolical of the Old Testament saints and the New Testament saints — the great company of the heads of the heavenly priesthood. This is the reason why they are said to be four-and-twenty — which was the number of courses of priests under the Mosaic dispensation. You must not suppose that the twenty-four means twenty-four individuals — there might be thousands, possibly millions of saints. The great idea of the symbol, I take it, is that the twenty-four are the heavenly priesthood — the chief-priests of glory. God is to have other priests and kings besides these. Who are they? Persons who are called to the knowledge of God after the elders are taken to heaven. For, remember, the elders are never added to; you never find twenty-five or twenty-six — still less have you thirty-six or forty-eight. There is no addition. It is a complete body. Now, that is a very important fact. Others will be objects of divine grace, but they are not added to the four-and-twenty elders — they are grouped by themselves. They are a company blessed of God — glorified, no doubt, in due time, but not added to the twenty-four.

We must leave room for the dealings of God. God is sovereign; and if I can believe in the sovereignty of God now in one form, I can believe it in another. The Book of Revelation shows particularly this very principle. Later

on in the book, for instance, you have a company seen standing on a sea of glass; and, what is very remarkable, on a sea of glass mingled with fire. In the fourth chapter of Revelation there is a sea of glass, but no fire. In the fifteenth chapter, where you have this fresh company of conquerors, it is a sea of glass mingled with fire. What does this mean? They have passed through tribulation. The others, you see, have gone up before that terrible tribulation. In their case the symbol of fire would have no meaning.

Perhaps I ought to explain what is meant by this symbol of a sea of glass. Whether in reference to the first company or to the second, the sea would be a natural thought. A sea of water would be for washing us from the defilements we acquire in our passage through this world. The priests, you know, used to be first washed all over; but afterwards, whenever they went to do service in the Temple, they washed their hands and their feet. In the heavenly sea there is no longer water but glass. Why? Because it is no longer a question of getting impurity removed. Theirs is all gone. It could never have an entrance to heaven. Therefore, you see, first of all, when the elders are caught up to heaven at the coming of the Lord — nothing else could take them up — there is a sea of glass, but no mingling with fire.

Then, in the central part of the book, you have this great tribulation — the most awful judgments of God upon man’s wickedness. The tribulation goes on; and in the fifteenth chapter you have the new company standing upon the sea of glass, with harps of gold in their hands, and singing the song, not of the Lamb merely, but of Moses and the Lamb. The twenty-four elders sing the song of the Lamb merely. We do not sing the song of

Moses. It will be all very well by-and-by for the converted Jews to do so, and so they will; but we have learned, by the grace of God, the surpassing glory of the Lord Jesus. On the mount of transfiguration the apostle asked to be allowed to build three tabernacles — one for Moses, and one for Elias, and one for Christ. No, says God the Father; “This is my beloved Son, hear ye him.” He is the one surpassing and exclusive Object in this new song. Don’t let anyone suppose that I mean the smallest disrespect to Moses as a servant of God. Far from that. I hold every word Moses has written to be inspired. The Lord Jesus never was called to write anything, because He was the Word, and it would not have been suitable to His glory that He should have written a line. He was above all that. It is not a question, then, of His writing, but of the Holy Ghost leading others to write about Him. Thus, you see, in the sixth chapter of Revelation, the elders sing merely of God and the Lamb, whereas this new company that come through tremendous tribulation will sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. It is not called a new song at all. It is very important to lay hold of these differences in Scripture.

Now, then, apply this to what we have before us. The Lord will come, and, as the instant effect, will gather all His own to be with Him in heaven. The Spirit of God will begin the work of converting souls by the word, particularly amongst the Jews, but it will not be confined to them. He will work a work both in the Jews and in the Gentiles; only they will not be brought into one body. That remarkable property, that exclusive quality, of the church of God, the obliterating distinction between Jew and Gentile, will no longer characterise the work of God; but the Jews will be converted as Jews, and the Gentiles

as Gentiles. In the seventh chapter of Revelation they are seen as two distinct bodies — first, out of all the twelve tribes, and then all the multitude that no man could number.

I am aware that there are learned men who say they are the same; but, really, their mode of interpretation is a matter of constant wonder to me. No simple man could believe they were the same. Sometimes it requires a deal of reasoning to make one receive such a thought as that. When people get completely occupied with a thing, it is astonishing how they can persuade themselves and others to believe it. To my conviction, there will be two companies. I think this lies clearly upon the face of the statements of Scripture — not only for the simplest reader, but for the most profound theologian. There will be a company out of all Israel that are sealed, and an immense company out of the Gentiles. Over these, during the millennium, the Lord will reign when He comes again. But, besides these, there will be a number of persons who are killed. They do not live to be under the Lord's reign; and thus, if the Lord did not work something very blessed for them, they would lose both the heavenly glory of the church, and the earthly joy of those who are to people the earth when He comes to reign in glory. What does He for them? He waits until the very last man has suffered, and then also He brings them risen from the dead into heavenly glory.

I know there are those who manifest a great deal of confusion about that. They fancy that everybody must be raised exactly at the same moment. It is perfectly true that we shall be raised at the same moment; but why all others should be raised along with us seems to me peculiar. I do not see any necessity for it at all, but the

reverse. The fourth verse of the twentieth of Revelation bears very distinctly on the importance of distinguishing between the coming of the Lord and the day of the Lord — “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them; and [I saw] the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God; and those who worshipped not the beast, neither his image, neither received his mark on their foreheads or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

Who were these? The first were the elders that came out of heaven. These were the persons who had long been in heaven, and consequently in their case, you observe, they had their seats upon the thrones already, and judgment was given unto them — not judgment executed on them. The very reverse. They were to judge the world, to judge the angels, as we are told by the apostle Paul in First Corinthians.

Next, “And [I saw] the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God.” I saw the souls — not the bodies. There, clearly, you have a company of people that had suffered after the elders had been taken to heaven, and they were still in the separate state. He saw the separate spirits or souls of those that were beheaded. Do not be carried away with the idea that souls sometimes means persons. Of course we know that; but it is easy to discriminate whether separated souls or living persons are meant. “Seventy souls went down into Egypt.” That is very intelligible. They were not separated souls, but persons; but if I said seventy souls of the people went down into Egypt, this would be another thing. In short, a different form of phraseology would have been used. Scripture is always most precise.

I entirely deny what unbelievers say, that things are loosely expressed there. Had it been — “I saw seventy souls that had been beheaded,” it is evident that it would be so many persons that were meant.

Lastly, “And which had not,” etc. There is here a slight but unfortunate mistranslation. It should be, “and those who (or, such as) had not worshipped the beast” — a third class of persons. This is now generally conceded. I do not think that any scholar has any doubt about it. Dean Alford, who was a good scholar, takes it as here — a third class. The late Mr. Elliott does the same. I mention them, because they do not agree with me in many respects; but I agree with them and they with me in this, that there are three classes. The first is those already glorified, and not a word, therefore, about their souls; whereas, in the second and third classes, we find the souls — first, the souls of persons that had been beheaded for the word of God, and then those that would not accept the mark of the beast, in the last part.

If you want to find confirmation of this, you will find it in the sixth chapter of Revelation, where the souls were seen underneath the altar — in a separate state, of course — and they were told that they were to wait till the number of their brethren that were to be slain as they were should be fulfilled. There is the second class. There were to be two bodies of sufferers — the first body in the beginning of Revelation, and the second body in the fifteenth; and now both classes are here before us. But before we hear of these two in their separate state, we have the elders in their glorified state. (1) “I saw thrones, and they sat upon them... and (2) I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus... and (3) those that had not worshipped the

beast... and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." Why is it said that the two last classes lived? Because till now they were in the separate state. It is not said of those who sat upon the thrones, as being needless; but it was necessary to tell us that those were to live who had been martyred in the Apocalyptic crisis.

When did all this beheading take place, and this sealing of those that would not accept the mark of the beast? During the time of the great tribulation. So you have those who had to pass not merely a sea of glass, but a sea of glass mingled with fire. The coming of the Lord involves the translation of those, now waiting for Him. Then comes an interval of tremendous teal, through which souls are to be born of God, many of whom will have to suffer; but they will have their sufferings made up to them by being raised up when the Lord appears in glory, and they will all reign together — they that had been already caught up, and those that now rise; while they that are still alive are the blessed people of the millennium, who will form the nucleus of that great scene of blessing which will fill the whole earth; for surely Jehovah Jesus will reign in that day.

I have now presented to you as clear a sketch of this important subject as I could in a single lecture. But the great point I press is the essential difference between the exercise of grace in the coming of the Lord to take His own to be with Him, and the exercise of judgment when it is the day of the Lord. That is the distinction you have to bear in mind — the christian characterised by a grace that takes him up to heaven; the Jew characterised by the Lord's appearing to exercise judgment, which will leave him unimpeded by his enemies here below. Our blessing does not depend upon

the execution of judgment. Our blessing is of pure sovereign grace. We had no claims, no deserts, not even pleas in support of our case; and when the Lord comes to receive us, there will be no execution of judgment on the earth whatever. But it will be different when He appears to save the poor Jews. They must go through a retributive time of tribulation; and then the Lord, at the last moment, when they seem about to be swept away, comes down on their enemies and delivers the godly remnant.

In this you have, I believe, an outline, and it is for you to make the truth your own. Search the word, and you will find abundant proofs crowding upon you as you read with faith; but you never will so read, and never get full profit, unless your souls are thoroughly clear as to your own redemption. This is the indispensable condition of growing in the knowledge of Christ, and of real intelligence in the word of God. If you are not clear about the gospel, where is the good of talking much about the second advent? And, therefore, I press upon you to take care your souls have shared in the blessing of the first. Amen.

The Second Advent Before, not After, the Millennium

Bible Treasury 17:137, etc.

Scripture is not only the mine, but the standard, of truth. Error cannot stand before the inspired word. Not that the believer is competent of himself either to draw out or to apply aright; our sufficiency is from God, Who also made us sufficient, says the apostle, as ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

Every Christian cites 1 Thess. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:19; 1 Thess. 3:13; 1 Thess. 4:16, etc.; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 1:6-10; 2 Thess. 2:1, 2, 8; 2 Thess. 3:5, to prove that Christ's coming, or παρουσία, is our hope, and that His day will bring judgment on the world. With all this, it is allowed, the apostle's later Epistles agree, as do those of James, Peter, John, and Jude. It is not otherwise with the Gospels.

But it is a strange position to except the Book of Revelation, especially Rev. 20:1-8, unless we concede the synchronism of vv. 8, 9, with 2 Thess. 2:8! Even so it is confessed that the very great difficulty is involved of a preliminary victory over Satan earlier than the final victory. "But possibly," says professor Beet, "the events of Rev. 19:11, Rev. 20:4, may take place without any interruption of the ordinary course of human life" (p. 30)! Let the Christian read and judge.

To what is all this unbelieving perplexity owing? To the notion that Christ's coming cannot possibly be followed by the millennium and its subsequent conflict, and must

therefore follow these events. But is this true? What saith the scripture?

The Lord taught the disciples, not merely that He was to return from heaven, but that they were to be as men looking for him. “Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning; and be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their lord, when he shall return from the marriage feast; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may straightway open unto him “(Luke 12:35, 36). Of a millennium to intervene first, not a word. What is said rather excludes it; for will it be a “little flock” as now, when “Jehovah’s people shall be all righteous,” and “all nations shall flow” unto the mountain of Jehovah’s house? Christ’s coming was not a mere doctrine assented to, nor a prophetic event at such or such a date. A living hope was bound up, with His coming — they knew not how soon. The Lord laid the utmost stress on their state of habitual expectancy — that when He comes and knocks, they may open immediately unto Him. “Blessed are those (He adds, v. 37) Whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching.” This goes far beyond mere acquiescence that He will come at some distant date.

Prof. Beet treats this attitude even now, and of course à fortiori of old, as a mistake. “It was near to the thought of the early Christians”; yet he agrees with the infidel that it was an error. “It must be at once admitted that we cannot, with reasonable confidence, expect a return of Christ during the lifetime of men now living. Still less can we daily expect His return” (pp. 149, 150). This with a vengeance is the higher criticism of modern thought.

It is really bolder than any man should be with (not apostles only but) the Lord of all. Did not He know the truth? Did He deliberately set His own to watch in a way open to Gibbon's sneer or Mr. B.'s correction? Did He not encourage them to watch for His coming from heaven as the only right state of soul? His teaching is uniformly to this end: so much so that He characterized the evil servant in Matt. 24:48 by saying in his heart, "My lord tarrieth," the prelude to beating his fellow-servants, and to eating and drinking with the drunken. In accordance with this the Lord presents the virgins in the following parable as gone forth to meet the bridegroom. Such in fact was the position of the early Christians, the wise and the foolish alike. The Lord warned that during His delay they would all go asleep, as they all did. This was but partially "in the days of the apostles"; but it became worse and worse not long after. Certain it is, as He predicted, that soon "they all slumbered and slept." But the Lord also indicates that "at midnight," when all was darkest, there is a cry, Behold the bridegroom! Come (or, Go) ye forth to meet him. Then what activity! all arose and trimmed their lamps. It is this cry that awakes slumbering Christendom. When the foolish are in quest of the grace they lack, the wise resume the original place so long abandoned by the saints, the bridegroom comes, and those that were ready go in with him to the marriage feast. The foolish and unready come to find the door was shut. It is false that our Lord's return was not expected as a constant outlook "by His better informed followers."

Nothing was revealed in prophecy to blunt the edge of that hope. The Lord seems to have expressly provided that His own, however intelligent, might be kept,

expecting Him as habitually as the simplest. Thus, as far as parabolic language goes, none could infer that the same saints should not go out to meet Him, fall asleep, wake up, go out afresh and in with Him to the wedding. On this principle are all the parables constructed: the wheat-and-tarefield, the mustard-seed, the leaven, and the rest in Matt. 13, in no way forbid but fall in with waiting for Him in their lifetime, whatever may be the filling up of the sketch as He tarries. It was the due posture of hope, which all the truth strengthens instead of weakening. Our Lord did predict in Luke 21, as well as in ch. 19, the near approaching destruction of Jerusalem: did this hinder it? Why, it also was in that one lifetime; and the next event described is His judicial dealing with mankind when seen coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Even Peter's death, and John's survival, are carefully so presented in John 21 and 2 Peter 1 as not to interfere with watching for Christ. A special revelation of the apostle's death left all open for the heart, and Peter recalls it only when about to depart. But he does more. In the same ch. 1 of his Second Epistle he distinguishes between "the prophetic word," and the "day-star arising in the heart." The former they had known, even in their unconverted days; and they did well to pay heed to it still. But now they had, or at least ought in the gospel to have, a better light than the lamp of prophecy, shining in the "squalid place" of the earth as it is. As Christians they should enjoy the heavenly light that shines through the rent veil, and Christ Himself as the morning star for the heart's hope, before the sun of righteousness cannot be hid from the world. It is therefore ignorance of scripture, and a misuse of prophecy, to let any supposed

intervening events check the hope of Christ's coming. The Lord, and the apostles, down to the last chapter of the Book of Revelation, always and strenuously make the hope independent of prophecy, not by a fanciful sentimentality, but by a revealed difference in nature and character. The hope is of Christ for heaven. Prophecy treats of events for the earth; which a better knowledge of the word learns to be subsequent. There is no earthly sign revealed to intercept the hope of Christ's coming for us, to receive us to Himself.

Now there are no Epistles of St. Paul so full of the hope as those to the Thessalonians. There, therefore, we may surely look not merely for better information, but for the unerring light of God.

Did the apostle then lead the saints in Thessalonica to look for the millennium before Christ's coming? He taught them, turning from their idols, as a part of their conversion, to wait for God's Son from heaven as well as to serve a living and true God (1 Thess. 1:10). And so filled was he for himself with this bright hope that in his labors this is his one unfailing joy, not any proximate prospect for European Asia or the world at large, but "Are not even ye, before our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming"? So he prays that the Lord would give them to abound in love to the establishing of their hearts in holiness before our God and Father at our Lord's coming with all His saints. He will not, does not, sever "that day" from the actual moment in his desires for them and all. Then ch. 4 is worthy of close attention. The Christians at Thessalonica were so intent on the immediate coming of Christ, that they grieved excessively over one or more of their number who had died. This was just the occasion to tell them, as so many

do, that death is to all practical purposes the coming of Christ to that individual. Whatever analogy people may frame, the apostle presents our Lord's coming as the divine comfort and remedy for, or rather His triumph over, it. But he does this in a way which demonstrates the fundamental antagonism of post-millennialism to the true hope. "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep" (1 Thess. 4:15). The same formula he carefully repeats in vv. 16, 17: "and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in clouds to meet the Lord in the air" etc. If the express intention of the Holy Spirit had been to set the apostle with the saints, then living, in looking for Christ always, assured of His coming soon but not knowing when, could any words be conceived more suited to the purpose? How easy to have put "those who might be alive" when He comes, in the third person, — to have said "they," as he did say of the deceased.

Nor is it here and now only that the inspired writer so speaks. In 1 Corinthians, written after both those to the Thessalonians, we find precisely the same thing in his great vindication of the resurrection, when he adds a secret as to the saints found alive at the advent. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed... for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51, 52). Compare also 2 Cor. 5:1-10, converging on the same point. It is therefore the clearly maintained principle of a proximate, not an ultimate, hope. The language of scripture joins issue with the theology of the schools.

Christendom has lost the tongue of Canaan, because the truth is no longer a living reality for men. The apostle put no date, and made not a shade of error. Like his Master, he in the Spirit would have the saints ever waiting and looking for Christ's coming.

Beyond controversy the early part of 1 Thess. 5 speaks of the day of the Lord in a way wholly different from that which prevails among our "negative " brethren. It is judicial for the world which it will overtake as a thief in the night, but not the Christian who certainly ought not to be in darkness, that that day should overtake him so. How could it surprise any suddenly if it cannot be before a thousand years of peace beyond example? The coming of the Lord rightly held presupposes the believer resting on redemption, sealed with the Holy Spirit of God, and already meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Those who confound the Lord's coming and His day are as the rule in a like confusion as to the soul; they rarely distinguish aright the work of Christ for them and of the Spirit in them. In such a condition they rather dread, than welcome, the coming of the Lord, and willingly drop into the illusion of great progress and of indisputable improvement, both in the churches and in society at large... To these must be added the many triumphs of the foreign mission field. Before our eyes Christ... is going forth conquering and to conquer (p. 151). How averse such minds are and must be from the solemn warnings of divine judgment! Yet how plain and sober is scriptural truth! Hear the scriptures that speak of God's purpose to fill the earth with His glory and the knowledge of it: Num. 14:21; Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14. In all these the connection is with His judicial dealings, not

with our preaching the gospel. Nothing is so blinding, and self-exalting, as unbelief.

Could a better informed follower of Christ say that the Thessalonians, “like so many others since, had misunderstood St. Paul to teach that the Great Day was close at hand”? (p. 150). Really such misunderstanding, both of St. Paul and of the Thessalonians, is discreditable, though a too prevalent error. It is no opinion but a fact, now recognized by the Revisers (of 1881), as well as by all recent translators and reliable commentators, that the ground of such an impression is a mere blunder, though it misled every body for more than a thousand years. I pointed it out to my friend Dr. D. Brown many years ago, while he lived in Glasgow, before exposing it in public. Yet there it stands uncorrected still in the sixth edition of his Second Coming (pp. 4, 5, 42-51, 425-433), though he has not ventured to controvert, as I am persuaded neither he nor any other can fairly overthrow, the evidence of it. The delusion which alarmed the Thessalonians was the cry that the day of the Lord was actually come (ἐνέστηκεν); and the apostle beseeches them by, or for the sake of (ὑπὲρ), the reassuring hope of the Lord’s coming and our gathering together unto Him, not to be shaken about that day (2 Thess 2:1). First, it was the disturbance of fear, and this through the false alarm that the day had come, not at all excitement about the blessed hope; which hope on the contrary is appealed to as a reason by the way to comfort them against their groundless alarm. Secondly, the true text and translation of the last clause in 2 Thess. 2:2 is, beyond doubt, “as that the day of the Lord is present.”

Dr. Brown and Prof. Beet are under a delusion here about God's word less excusable than that of the Thessalonian saints. Not only do they wholly mistake what was at work then and there, but they set thereby the apostle at war with himself. For their misunderstanding makes him explode here what he urges later on the Romans (Rom. 13:12), that the day is at hand (ἤγγικεν). Compare too Phil. 4:5, Heb. 10:37. James speaks similarly (James 5:8); and so substantially Peter (1 Peter 4:7). Indeed the Lord had Himself impressed His coming suddenly as a motive for all to watch in the early Gospel of Mark (13:35-37); and none other is what we may call, pace Prof. Beet, His last word closing the Apocalypse. It seems clearly meant to hinder that fatal misuse of the prophetic visions, which enfeebles, if not frustrates, the divinely given hope of His coming. "He which testifieth these things saith, Yea, I come quickly." Did John cavil or correct his Master? He answered, "Amen; come, Lord Jesus."

The apostle next explains that the day — for this was the question, not His coming to gather us to, Himself on high, but His day or judicial dealing with the world — cannot be till the evils are completely developed, which that day is to judge. Of these he specifies the apostasy, the falling away from God's truth after being once professed; and further the revelation of the lawless one, as the consummation of the mystery of lawlessness already at work. Once the actual hinderer was removed, the lawlessness doing its secret evil would culminate and be manifested in the lawless one whom the Lord Jesus shall slay (or destroy) with the breath (or spirit) of His mouth, and shall bring to naught by the shining forth (or appearing) of His coming — not by His coming

simply, but by the appearing of it (2 Thess. 2:8). Now when Christ, our life, shall be manifested, then (τότε, not εἶτα) shall we also with Him be manifested in glory (Col. 3:4). It is the moment of His and our appearing, after we have been caught up to Him.

Prof. Beet abandons the Protestant interpretation (reformers and also historicism) of the apostasy or at least of the man of sin. What unbiased Christian can wonder?

There is nothing now corresponding in the least degree to the tremendous antagonist of God and man described in 2 Thess. 2:4 (p. 150). This may be true as to the person, but the principles are latently at work; and it is unwise to speak as he does of the slow development in modern times of forces bad, if not of good. The passage itself, if we were not living in an age of movement intensely rapid in every sense, most naturally prepares us for the most sudden display of the son of perdition, depending as this does simply on the removal of him that restraineth now. Undoubtedly the worst evil, the lawless person (Antichrist), must be revealed before that day which is to annul him; but to say that the day is not near is flatly to contradict the word of the living God, as well as ignorance of what the text here teaches. Only Mr. B. is to be congratulated for breaking loose from the post-millennial argument, under which others still lie, that the παρουσία of our Lord in 2 Thess 2:1 is His personal advent, in v. 8 is only figurative. This sleight of hand Prof. B. repudiates (p. 22). He owns it is the same throughout; but where then is his millennium before Christ comes? The text reveals a continuity of unbridled willfulness, already working as leaven, till it rise (on the removal of an existing barrier) into a

revealed head, the lawless one to fall under the Lord Jesus in His day. How then possibly foist in there the millennium before that day? The Thessalonians, misled as they were by the delusion of a judgment-day already come, fell into no such a preposterous dream as this truly strange doctrine.

It is unfounded then, as a commentator ought to have known, a mere vulgar error, that the Thessalonians had misunderstood St. Paul. He himself gives quite a different source of the mischief. He speaks of either a word, or spirit, or epistle as from us, i.e., pretending so to be (2 Thess 2:2). It was not his First Epistle misunderstood, but a spurious communication that is meant; for the apostle never taught anything in the least resembling it. The misleaders must have insinuated a figurative day of the Lord under the gospel, answering to such partial or germinant applications of that day as we have in Isa. 13, 19, etc., on Babylon, Egypt, etc. For the Thessalonian saints were passing through sore trial and persecution; so that he had sent Timothy even before his First Epistle, lest by any means the tempter had tempted them to the compromise of their faith and of his own labor. He foresaw their danger of being moved by these afflictions. It seems to have been just in this way that Satan was now working.

Before the First Epistle they were so enthusiastic as to be cast down exceedingly because some fell asleep; for they imagined that these would thereby lose their place at Christ’s coming. This was dispelled by the assurance that these also put to sleep by Jesus will God bring with Him; for, when He descends from heaven with an assembling shout, the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we the living that remain shall be caught up together

with them. But the more serious error corrected in the Second Epistle is about the living on whom the false teachers sought to bring the terror of the day of the Lord, availing themselves probably of their sore trials as indicating that the day was come. Not so says the apostle in 2 Thess 1. In that day the trouble will be to the persecutors and other wicked men; the righteous are to rest. Their blessed hope of being gathered to the Lord at His coming ought to have guarded them from such a panic. Besides, that day can only arrive when secret lawlessness is replaced (the barrier being gone) by the openly lawless one whom the Lord Jesus will destroy by the appearance of His coming. Not misunderstanding but positive deception marked the misleaders. They were Judaizers; and they wrought by fear of that day as come, not by the hope of the Lord's coming, as not a few imagine. Beyond doubt a previous millennium can find no place either in the thoughts of the Thessalonians or in the apostle's words.

It is hard to understand why 1 Cor. 1:7, 9, or 2 Cor. 15:23, 52, or 2 Cor. 5:10, should be adduced pp. 22, 23). They are appropriate and forcible for those who believe in waiting for the coming of Christ in His day; but how do they even appear to furnish the shadow of an argument for an antecedent millennium of earthly blessedness? Is there any reality or even show of proof in the Synoptic Gospels to which we are next turned (p. 23)? Where is there a millennium before Christ's coming in Matt. 13? 16? or 24? What evidence there is is clean opposed to the post-millennial plan. The tares sown among the wheat are never removed till the harvest; and the harvest the Lord explains as the completion of the age (σ. τοῦ αἰῶνος) not the end of the world, which

“world” is expressly distinguished only in the verse before (Matt. 13:38, 39). Where is the millennium here before the second advent?

The same objection applies with yet more force to the use made of Matt. 16:27. Does this text prove a millennium before it? When the Son of Man comes, He awards to each according to his doing. Is this only to be cast into the lake of fire?

Prof. Beet, indeed, allows the just force of συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος to be “completion of the age.” Now Matt. 12:32 speaks of “the age to come,” as well as of “this age,” which was to end with His coming. What is meant? Does it not signify the future age when the Messiah should reign, as distinguished from the age of the law not yet come to its close? Blasphemy against the Spirit shall be forgiven in neither. Whatever may be pardoned in either age, that cannot be. That is, this age and the coming one are two dispensations. The nature of the case excludes the eternal scene where there is no question of either sin or its forgiveness. If there be an αἰὼν to come after this which is closed by the Lord’s coming, what can it be but the millennium? Heb. 6:5 confirms this. The powers of the “age to come” mean samples of such power over Satan, disease, and the like, which the disciples wrought when Christ was here and subsequently; of which the age to come will be the full theatre, and display to God’s glory, when Satan’s overthrow will be manifest all over the earth.

But there is yet more to observe in Matt. 13:41, 42. Does anyone doubt that it is of the harvest-field, the world, our Savior speaks as His kingdom, whither at His coming His angels are sent to gather out all offences (or

trap-falls) and those that practice lawlessness? On the other hand, who can question that, when the earth is thus purged (not yet dissolved or destroyed) for the Son of man's kingdom, then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of the Father? It is the age to come before eternity, the millennial age, wherein are the glorified on high, and the earth delivered from the usurper and blessed under the reign of Christ. For, as the Lord taught in the Fourth Gospel, God's kingdom comprises, not only "earthly things," as to which Nicodemus was so dull, but "heavenly things," (John 3:12) which only came to full light when Christ was glorified, and the Spirit could lead into them those who enjoyed redemption through His blood.

A King reigning in righteousness will characterize the new age. Now the Lord sits on the Father's throne (Rev. 3:21); then He will sit on His own throne and will rule with a rod of iron, shattering all that rebel as the vessels of the potter. So it will be in the age to come or millennium. How absurd to apply this to the eternity that succeeds! As it has been well remarked, righteousness dwells in the new heavens and new earth when the promise is fulfilled absolutely and for ever. It is no question then of righteous government which represses or punishes evil, as in the millennial day. Neither is it this "evil age" when grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 5:21). Now the Lord asks, or prays, not for the world, but for His own, the gift of the Father (John 17:9). By and by, when this age is to close, and the coming one to dawn, He asks the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. It will be no question then of the mysteries

of the kingdom during which He is the rejected but glorified Son of Man. Having received for Himself the kingdom (Dan. 7, Luke 19), He returns. During His absence His servants, according to the parable, trade with the money entrusted, and on His return receive according to fidelity; as the citizens who hated Him and would not let Him reign over them are slain before Him. Here is without doubt the coming of Christ, but not a hint of a millennium before it; whilst the character of the judgment executed at His coming perfectly suits a millennium, not an eternity to follow.

The same lesson flows from Luke 17, where the days of Noah and of Lot are by Himself compared with the day when the Son of Man is revealed. Here is not the smallest resemblance to the loosing of Satan and the war of Gog and Magog in Rev. 20, any more than to the past siege of Jerusalem by Titus (A.D. 70). Before the Lord appears in judgment it will be so, as we may see in 1 Thess. 5. When His day comes as a thief, it will overtake them eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, building, marrying and given in marriage. How strange to apply Luke 17:31 to the dissolution of all things! or even to the destruction of Jerusalem! It is neither an indiscriminate judgment in providence, with which vv. 34, 35 stand in marked contrast, nor yet the last judgment, with which not a feature tallies. It is simply and only the Lord’s appearing, with the millennium to follow this judgment of the quick which it cannot precede.

But we must not omit Matt. 25:31-46. How any sober Christian can turn this scene into the counterpart of Rev. 20:11-15 is inexplicable, if one knew not the power of prejudice. The latter is expressly a judgment of the

dead, without one living man; the other not even of all living men, but only of all the Gentiles or nations, the Jews being before us in the early part of Matt. 24 and professing Christians in the parables that close ch. 24 and go on to Matt. 25:30. Hence it is the King as such Who judges the Gentiles on their treatment of His envoys, His brethren; and they are set as sheep on His right or as goats on His left accordingly. This is wholly foreign to the judgment of the dead at the end of all in Rev. 20, the "resurrection of judgment"; as vv. 4-6 gave us the previous "resurrection of life," answering to John 5. That of the righteous only is before us in John 6, 1 Thess. 4, and 1 Cor. 15. As this is a resurrection from among the dead, it is necessarily prior, like Christ's, to that of the remaining dead. And εἶτα "then" may be a long interval as easily as a short; just as "hour" and "day" may last a thousand years and more, as the context proves. But where in all these texts, or in any of them, is Prof. B.'s millennium before the Second Advent?

Throughout St. Paul's Epistles and the Gospels, to which we might add the Book of Acts and the Epistles of James and Peter and Jude, we find everywhere the same metaphors and the same phraseology (p. 26). So say those opposed. But let us read on. The early Christians were looking for Christ's sudden and visible return from heaven, to raise the dead, good and bad, to judge all men, and to bring in eternal retribution. Really this is a perplexing argument from one whose theme is that Christ's coming must follow the millennium. Rev. 20:1-8 is therefore the millstone around the Professor's neck, which must be somehow got rid of and cast into the sea, if possible.

Now it is wholly denied that the blessed manifested kingdom of Christ rests on that passage only of the N.T., while the O.T. prophets are full of it, yea law, Psalms, and Prophets. Take Acts 3:19-21, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and He may send Jesus Christ, Who hath been fore-appointed unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, of which God spoke by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” Seasons of refreshing were to come from the Lord’s presence, Who would send Jesus that had been fore-appointed for them (Israel’s repentance being in full view, as usually for the millennium). Heaven must receive Him till times for restoring all things according to prophecy. That is, Jesus will be sent to bring in these blessed times when all things shall be (not destroyed, as in Prof. Beet’s scheme, but) reconstituted, as the prophets of old testified. Christ will come from heaven to earth in order to establish millennial blessing. The Greek must be wholly altered to bear the meaning “till all be accomplished.” Christ is on high till times come of restoring all, not till all shall have been restored. Having received the kingdom, He returns in it, and must reign till He has put all His enemies under His feet; for He is to abolish all rule, and all authority, and power, before He gives up the kingdom at the end of all. The repentance of Israel, the return of Jesus, the restoring of all things, besides fulfillment of the prophetic word, point to the millennial kingdom.

Again, Luke 20:34, 35, is entitled to great weight on this head, as it also confirms what has been already said on

Matt. 12, 13, and Heb. 6. “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage; but they that are accounted worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead,” etc. Before eternity arrives “that age” is to run its course, as well as “this age” to close. And “that age,” or dispensation, is characterized here by “the resurrection of the just,” those counted worthy to have part in that age and the resurrection from the dead. How contrasted with the dead who, unworthy and unblessed and unholy, are only raised, after “that age” is over, for a resurrection of judgment and the lake of fire! Scripture never speaks of a general resurrection but of two distinct risings — of life, and of judgment, separated by the kingdom of Christ and those who reign with Him, the only age when these thousand years of blessing for the earth that now is can be in consistency with Scripture. Compare Phil. 3:11, 20, 21. To say that the resurrection from the dead is not as peculiar by priority of time as well as in nature, accompaniments and issues, is to give up the force of language as well as description and context. The phrase itself is so weighty that one of the ablest, stumbled by faulty premillennialists, made the wrong vulgar reading in Phil. 3:11 a chief ground of objection, as Griesbach strangely accepted it. It is now exploded by all critics. What would the late Mr. Gipps have said now?

The more one weighs Prof. B.’s words on the Book of Revelation generally, and on Rev. 20 especially, the less one can accept them.

“That this event” — “the one definite event for which the early Christians were waiting,” (Christ’s return) “is less conspicuous in the Book of Revelation (!) than in the rest of the New Testament (!!) excites no surprise” (p. 27)!!!

To ordinary Christians this seem as surprising a deliverance as one has heard for a long while. The reason is as peculiar as the conclusion. The other writers leave us outside the veil (which is untrue); the Revelation takes us within, and portrays the unseen world before, and during, and after, the coming of Christ. And therefore! in a book which is thus instinct with what is before, and during, and after Christ's coming, this event is less conspicuous than elsewhere, where it is touched on for the most part practically, and but occasionally if we except 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Q.E.D.

"The question nevertheless remains, Where, amid the many and various visions of this mysterious book, shall we place the great event," [etc.] Yes, this is just Prof. B.'s difficulty, because he is not content to believe it where God has placed it and written it for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope. "The only answer" to this question which seems good in his eyes is, that we must not leave it where "this mysterious book" gives it, and we must "place" it, where this book testifies that Christ does not and cannot come. In Rev. 20:11 there is total and manifest contrast with Christ's coming found in the Gospels and Epistles, save the fact of Christ's sitting on a throne (which is true generally of His reign for a thousand years and more, to say nothing of His present seat on His Father's throne). Is it seriously contended that the twelve sitting as assessors on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory, symbolizes with the eternal judgment of the dead? Then is the time when 1 Cor. 6:2, 3 will be fulfilled; not the outrageous

confusion with the judgment of the dead, where are no thrones nor assessors, whatever commentators may dream and say. And so in Matt. 24 the powers of the heavens are shaken, and all tribes of the earth mourn, and the angels gather together His elect (which the context here limits to Israel) from one end of heaven to the other. But all these statements describe a time different from and anterior to the fleeing away of the earth and the heaven when no place will be found for them. They abide in Matt. 24, but not Rev. 20:11.

The other collocations of scriptural texts in p. 28 have been already shown to be unsound and imaginary, doing violence to Scripture at every turn. And all this to blot out the appearing of Christ from Rev. 19:11-21 where it is revealed, and to foist it into Rev. 20:11 where there is no coming described, for the very plain and decisive reason that He will have come already! Nor is it too much to say that, unless Christ come before, it becomes no longer possible thenceforth; for Christ's coming means to this earth whence He ascended (Acts 1). Now before the white-throne judgment the first heaven and the first earth passed away. As nobody pleads for coming to the heaven and new earth of eternity, it is demonstrable that He must have come before "the end," when the elements are dissolved with fervent heat. Christ's coming therefore must be before, not after, the millennium. What avail our notions of difficulty, or facility, or safety (pp. 29-31), against the word of God? Matt. 25:32 at the beginning of the kingdom is in no way inconsistent with Rev. 20:7-10 at the end. The camp of the saints and the beloved city (Jerusalem) may be compassed; but not a saint is hurt, and not a sinner escapes: fire from God out of heaven comes down and

devours the bad. Surely if there was affliction for the oppressors, and rest for the oppressed, proved gloriously at the Lord's revelation from heaven (2 Thess. 1:6, 7), there is nothing in that to reconcile with divine judgment falling on the unconverted of the millennium, who had rendered feigned obedience, till at the end the temptation of Satan proves the irremediable evil of man not born of God, in presence of glory then so long familiar, as now in contempt of God's grace.

Nor is there any such strange confusion as adversaries feign. The risen saints reign with Christ over (not "on") the earth; the saints threatened come together as such, consisting of saved Israel and the godly Gentiles. Only the wicked die at that time under God's hand (Isa. 65). On the Holy Mount the Lord had once shown a vision of His power and coming, where on the one hand men appeared in glory, and on the other men in their unchanged bodies, and Christ the head of both. Was not this a little sample of the kingdom that is to be? It does not answer either to this age, or to eternity. Why is it judged incredible with you (alas! in Christendom), if God does what He says? It was, for men who had not tasted of death in this age, a vision of the kingdom of God coming in power (Matt. 16:28-17:13; 2 Peter 1:16), the beautiful and impressive foreshadowing of that which shall be at the advent, when the glorified shall reign over the earth, and Israel and the nations are here below. It pleased Christ: surely nothing but extreme prejudice, not to say the carnal mind, makes it displeasing to Christians. The kingdom of God comprises "heavenly" as well as "earthly things" (John 3:3, 5, 12); and the sooner this is learned the better for souls.

Here indeed our men of allegory are deplorably astray. There is no complaint of the Fourth Gospel; but why speak so ungratefully of the “most mysterious book of the New Testament” (p. 137)? Many an unbelieving assault has been made on the Gospel; why then remind the unwary reader of the difficulties which surround the authorship of the Apocalypse? Prof. B. has ill-will enough to point out its “startling grammatical forms and entirely different modes of thought” (p. 38), in order to cast doubt or discredit on it. Yet he well knows how Paul and Peter and James have been each and all attacked more or less. But is it in him quite honest? He may not be aware that the peculiarities of form and thought belong to its prophetic character, and are wholly independent of its date and authorship, which are as certain as anything of the kind can be for all fair and competent students. But does he not himself believe that John the beloved, the Patmos prisoner of Domitian, wrote the book, even though here only he assumed the Hebraistic style and rough garment of a prophet? This was just as much in keeping with its revelation of judgment, as the Epistles and Gospel called for, and have, another mould of thought and speech for their design.

Let me say that Genesis in its noble simplicity is no more admirable an introduction to the Bible, than the Apocalypse is its suited, worthy, and profound completion. The wrestling-ground for contending commentators of every school, and hence open to the sneer of worldly men, divines or sceptics, too indifferent to God’s word, and too disposed to lay the faults of its misusers on the book itself, there it stands, still pronouncing the blessing of the Lord on him that reads its words, and on those that hear and keep them; “for

the time" (whatever unbelief may cry) "is at hand." And in fact where is the inspired book which, especially in difficult and dangerous times, has wrought more powerfully for good in grave Christian men, notwithstanding many a mistake through haste or prejudice? It is idle to expect that comprehensive and deep understanding of the Apocalypse should exist where there is not familiar acquaintance with all the prophets, as well as with the distinctive ways of God which the New Testament reveals. For where the Old Testament prophets are discursive in the main, and little beyond Daniel and Zechariah is consecutive, and even these have separate visions of no great length or variety, St. John was enabled by the Holy Ghost to communicate a systematic, connected, and complete view of the things which should be after "the things which are," or the church-state (Rev. 2, 3), till time melts into eternity under the judicial hand of our Lord and of His Christ.

No doubt some men of marked piety and general learning, and many with little of either, have written on the book; but even when they were so (marked by learning and piety), this is far from being all that is required to write competently and profitably on it. More than any other book, it openly presses into its service, or subtly refers to, almost every part of the Old Testament; yet is there a characteristically mystic use which is adapted to the New Testament and convicts the mere literalist of a wholly mistaken principle. Originality, after a divine sort, appears throughout; The most able and erudite of its expositors have been in no way distinguished for spiritual intelligence, and are often the devotees of a foregone conclusion, so that they can be entitled to little weight in such a question. And what is

the object of alleging mere and evident extravaganzas, from whatever quarter they may come? Is it to commend truth? or to merge God's word in men's uncertainties? It is the opprobrium of commentators, and of none so much perhaps as the prophetic, that they search, not for God's mind, but for the support of their own preconceived ideas; and that the repute of some draws a long train of followers; as their transparent fallacies provoke another crowd of opponents. Yet the truth remains, sure and acceptable in God's grace to those who have faith to depend on the Lord for it.

But surely John 17, on Prof. B.'s confession, belongs to "the solid platform" of the N. T. writers. Can it then be denied that in vv. 22, 23, we have in weightiest correlation those who are glorified on the one side, and on the other men alive on earth, whether yet to die or not (p. 31)? The glorified, and the unchanged are there in presence one of another, as the Lord teaches us, and with blessed result (in a prayer of His own heart), which these believers do not believe, and therefore venture to stigmatize as "mixed together in strangest confusion" (p. 31). It is really distressing unbelief on their part, who do not apprehend this the third unity — of glory. For there are three. The first (John 17:11) is the united expression before a hating world of the Father's name, given to Christ, and now to keep those who were then around Him. The second is in view of those who should believe through their word, unity of communion in the Father and the Son, that the world might "believe " (John 17:21). The third is the closing unity of glory, where therefore alone they are perfected into one; and, as it would be manifested, it is for the world to "know." The demonstration will be before their eyes; for Christ and

His own are to be displayed from heaven in the same glory.

With this agrees Rev. 21:9-22:5: a retrogressive vision introducing the relation of the Bride to the kings and nations after Christ comes; just as Rev. 17 is to show how the great Harlot stands toward the kings and nations before He comes. In both cases it is a return to give what was not before described. This is undeniable in the case of Babylon whose fall had been given in Rev. 14:8, and Rev. 16:19. Then Rev. 17 explains why, closing with the dirge in Rev. 18. So Rev. 21:1-8 is the everlasting state which is altogether distinct, the Lamb not being seen as such, but "God all in all." It is the conclusion chronologically of the series that began in Rev. 19, 20 and in fact the end of all, if we can so designate the everlasting state. As you can have nothing subsequent to eternity, the Holy Spirit helps us here as before by a mark (Rev. 21:9), strikingly similar to that which introduced the retrogressive description of Rev. 17, 18; so that we might discern a like retrogressive description of the Bride (not merely in heaven, as in Rev. 19, nor as in the new heavens and earth of Rev. 21:1-8 but) in its millennial aspect. That this is the truth appears clearly and certainly from "the nations" (Rev. 21:24, 26, Rev. 22:2), and "the kings of the earth" (Rev. 21:24), which are not and cannot be in eternity, as surely our opponents must admit. As it is not this age, any more than eternity, what can it be but the age to come, the millennium, or "the kingdom"? Prof. Beet therefore ought to see that his idea of "the everlasting splendor pictured in Rev. 21, 22" (p. 28) needs the corrective of the text itself more maturely and accurately weighed. Still less true is his statement in p.

34 that “there is nothing to prevent us from reading the glorious visions of the prophets as descriptions of the final glory.” Let him or Dr. Brown face Zech. 14 squarely, to take but a single text, and say whether such a chapter can be fulfilled either now or in eternity. When then? This is but a sample from the prophets, who in truth support nothing but premillennialism.

It is frankly acknowledged that the principle of new heavens and a new earth is laid down in Isa. 65, 66. But the remarkably abstract form of the Hebrew construction is not to be overlooked, not the relative and indicative, but the present participle, which seems a favourite way of describing an action apart from a specified actual time. There is another consideration which any observing Christian reader can see; — that the context restricts its application here to Jerusalem, and the land and the people of Israel. None can deny that the state of things portrayed is not eternity, any more than things as they ever were or are now, or can be, save in a different age. So even Dr. J. A. Alexander allows (Comm. in loco) that “it is a promise or prediction of entire change in the existing state of things; the precise nature of the change, and the means by which it shall be brought about, forming no part of the revelation here”. It is true that this change he, in his usual manner, inclines to believe moral or spiritual only. But this is a mere opinion: he admits an “entire change,” to which the Apocalypse gives the fullest scope, far beyond O.T. or Jewish limits, now that Christ is come and the Holy Spirit given that we might have the mind of Christ, and enter into the boundless counsels of God. It is sorrowful where such grace is not appreciated.

Thus then we have the symbol of the glorified church, the holy city Jerusalem (not the earthly one), but coming down out of heaven from God; yet there are “the nations,” and “the kings of the earth,” contemporaneously connected and blessed here below. It is in vain to cry What a mongrel state of things is this! What an abhorred mixture of things inconsistent with each other! (Brown’s Second Advent p. 392). It is no answer to speak of “the transient glimpses at the Transfiguration,” etc. The thesis is that God reveals a long millennial period, widely different from all that has been, and in many respects from the eternity which follows, to which those glimpses are a partial testimony. To the earth Christ will come in His own glory, and of the Father, and of the holy angels: there may be difficulties beyond what is revealed; but the opposite scheme, in the desire to delay His coming, and to deny the true character of the kingdom, makes His coming an impossibility; for it is imagined to be, when the earth and the heavens will have fled away. Now Christ is to come here again.

Take another instance, which the system of these brethren furnishes of the havoc it works for all the practice as well are the truth of the church. Indisputably Christians are called to be unworldly, suffering, separate, and subject like the crucified Lord here below. Now if Dan. 2:44 (p. 140) is thus misapplied to the kingdom already set up, the church has to subdue and destroy the imperial powers, or “anti-Christian systems,” as they are styled. That is, it must, like Popery, subjugate and overthrow all opposing powers that be. Thus does the church, through that error, become a rebel in Christ’s name, instead of a holy sufferer, as Christ and

His servants taught and practiced. Take it as God's kingdom when Christ comes "in the days of these kings," the ten toes of the statue, and all becomes true, plain, and consistent. No need then to metamorphose the instant and irreparable destruction of the powers into the slow dealing of providence, any more than to rob Christ of His prerogative of filling the whole earth with indisputable authority, immediately consequent on His judgment of the quick. Dan. 7 confirms this as the only true interpretation. The Ancient of days comes when judgment is given to the saints of the high or heavenly places. Then they will safely and holily reign with Christ to God's glory. To attempt it now is a sin and a lie; it is in theory if not in fact to play the part of fifth-monarchy men, whether Papists or Protestants, Covenanters or Roundheads.

The truth is that all is vague on this human scheme, which grew up as men neglected scripture, and hope in man supplanted faith in God. Christ personally recedes into the distance; and "His cause," identified with the efforts of men (of ourselves or persons like us), takes the place of Himself with His own. This may please and flatter our nature; but it betrays that sad decay of proper bridal affection which characterized the decline and fall of the church since apostolic days, through the darkness of medieval times, and which, in no way retrieved at the Reformation (however blessed as far as it went), has well-nigh vanished away in the isolating though busy unchurch-system of our century. I regret that I in speaking what is in my judgment unquestionable, one must wound the susceptibilities of many brethren I love and esteem highly. But let God be true, and Christ's honour above all; and the rather, as it

is in their highest interests that, if the truth, it should be spoken out. I repudiate a party or school of doctrine to cry up, and yet more the petty spite or vanity of crying down, those dear to the Lord.

Again, it ought not to be a light thing that the hope of Christ's coming, while owned in word, should become for children of God no more than a dead letter. This it must be where men look and labor avowedly, before Christ can possibly come, for a vainly expected universal diffusion of revealed truth, universal reception of true religion and unlimited subjection to Christ's scepter, universal peace, much spiritual power and glory, inbringing of all Israel, ascendancy of truth and righteousness, and great temporal prosperity over all the earth for a thousand years or more, perhaps much more, as a previously certain and revealed barrier. They may indeed love the Lord's appearing, and long for Him to break the usurper's spell over the world, and establish for rebellion peace, and for wretchedness blessing to God's glory. But it is unreal to profess waiting for One, Who, as you are assured, cannot possibly come yet, nor for a long while, according to this hypothesis. The hope ceases to be a present reality in the soul, as it is supposed to be a mistake of scripture. Watching for Him becomes a poetical idea, an amiable or pious enthusiasm, which, notwithstanding the positive and known hindrances from prophetic light, veers from long to short, and anon from short to long in a seesaw truly marvelous. So apologizes Principal Brown. Prof. Beet speaks with more open plainness of speech.

If we have no reliable proof of the nearness of the visible return of Christ, to speak of it as near is in the last

degree dangerous(p. 36). He knows the danger of what the Lord recommends! It represses missionary effort!

To the early christians, although the day of Christ was known to be not close at hand etc. (p. 152)! This error has been already refuted. The apostles speak in a way which a post-millennialist must in honesty avoid.

Like the Master, also the servants will die (p. 154). Not so, says St. Paul, but rather, “We shall not all sleep (die), but we shall all be changed.” It is appointed unto men, indeed, once to die, but after this the judgment. Faith in Christ and His work alters all for us. That was lost man’s sad portion; what is the Christian’s? Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and unto them that look for Him shall He appear a second time without sin unto salvation. The soul’s want was provided for at His first advent, as the body’s will be when He shall be seen a second time.

Christ is the Life as well as the Resurrection, and the saints so profit thereby, that according to scripture we ought to wait, as the early Christians did, not for death, but for Christ’s coming habitually. It was to be not only a sure goal of their hopes one day, but a practical constant outlook, confirmed, not corrected, even in both the Epistles to the Thessalonians, where, quite different misapprehensions were cleared up. But the divine light vouchsafed then shone brightly on that blessed and living hope, not only not setting it aside, but joining the inspired apostle with the saints alive on earth, as the “we” that wait (for aught that was made known) for His coming. A post-millennialist, if he expressed his creed, must say, They that shall be alive, that remain unto the coming of the Lord; he could not truly and intelligently

say, “We.” Either he knows better than the apostle, or he ought (as is the truth) to infer that his own system is false. None who holds this system can, ex animo, join the apostle and say, “We that are alive, that remain,” etc.

There is another fatal issue of post-millennalism. It presents the kingdom when supposed to be triumphant without the King. It abuses the present abnormal phase of the kingdom to deny its future regular form according to the Old Testament prophets as well as the New. Now the King, rejected by His earthly people is hid in God above, seated on the Father’s throne, not on His own (Rev. 3:21); and hence we have its “mysteries” made known, as in Matt. 13, to explain its singularities, till this age ends, and the new age displays it and the King reigning in righteousness, times of restoring all things, as God declared from the beginning. But this glorious exhibition before the universe for a thousand years is just what unbelief leaves out: an irreparable blank in God’s revealed plan, which cannot be without also introducing confusion every where else. Thus Christ’s person is absent from the scene of His exaltation, and the church is no longer to fast but enjoy honour and glory, where He was crucified without. It can be no longer true for the thousand years that His members suffer with Him. They are in idea, what the apostle said as a reproach and not without irony, — they are reigning “without us,” yea, without Christ. But, said the large and true-hearted servant, “and I would that ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.” When the day really comes, Christ will reign and all His risen saints. The Corinthians had practically dropped into a figurative reign of His cause.

But the word is, as long as there is a member of Christ, “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him.” “If so be that we suffer together, that we may be also glorified together.” And as they wrongfully exclude Christ from their millennium, so do they keep Satan in the face of positive scripture. The reasoning on 1 John 3:8-10; Heb. 2:14, 15, and Rom. 16:20, is as weak and false as the unbelief of Rev. 20:1-3, 7, is painful and complete. The issue is worthy of such grounds — the melancholy fable of the church in Christ’s hand not only defeating Antichrist, but for a thousand years never permitting the devil to gain an inch of ground to plant his foot on over the wide world! It must never be the truth of Christ reigning personally. I can conceive no interpretation of Rev. 20 more perverse, nor more at issue with the New Testament throughout. But indeed all that these believers say on the millennium is mere incredulity, a muster of cavils against its revealed character, and a substituted fanciful exaggeration of the present, but no real reign of Christ and the glorified saints, no personal exclusion of Satan, no true deliverance of the groaning creation, though Dr. Brown does admit a sort of restoration of Israel to their land, which ill assorts with his other views.

Nor is there any less loss for the soul now. For the hypothesis of a general resurrection and of a simultaneous universal judgment undermines the distinctive peace, joy, and assurance of salvation for the believer. Confound the two resurrections, enfeeble the resurrection of the saints from among the dead; and the consciousness of present union with Christ is impaired if not lost, and all is confusion as to the future. Christ’s coming, and His appearing, the great day and the white-

throne judgment, are all huddled together in one lump, so that the poor heart oscillates between hope and fear, the joy of meeting our Lord and the anxiety of judgment. In scripture how different! The saints even now live of the life of Christ risen from the dead (John 20:20; Col. 3:4); and accordingly life and salvation in His name both point to those spoken of as quickened with Him, raised up together, and seated together (not yet with, but) in Him in the heavenly places (Eph. 2). Christ has borne the believer's judgment; and so he comes not into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Undoubtedly he will give account of all done in the body (2 Cor. 5:10), and receive accordingly, no less than the unbeliever who, rejecting Christ, has neither life nor fruits of the Spirit, as the believer has. Hence for the one it is judgment, for the other it is not. And any Christian has but to consider and see the absurdity of being judged after you are justified, and of God too. Yea, the believer is glorified at Christ's coming before he renders an account, which supposes that he is saved, but determines the special position he is to receive in the kingdom. The resurrection of the just is therefore a resurrection of life, as that of the unjust is one of judgment. Believing in Christ, the saints had life here and now; they will be raised when He comes again, to have that life applied to their bodies which they already know for their souls since He first came. And it is as distinct in time as in principle and results; like His own it is a resurrection from among the dead, even if we were not told that there is an interval of at least a thousand years.

Nor is that interval without grave moral significance. It is a reign over the earth, but of heavenly glory with

Christ, for those who suffered with Him, as all saints do till He comes again. The millennial saints do not thus suffer, and hence do not share in this special reign, but enjoy its benefits to the full. In another sense all saints are to reign in life (Rom. 5:17, millennial with the rest), throughout eternity. It is no question of suffering for Christ, or being martyrs, as many have gathered from a hasty view of scripture, and especially of Rev. 20:4, though the passage itself leaves ample room for all that had suffered with Christ. For if children, heirs also — heirs of God and joint-heirs with Him; if we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified with Him (Rom. 8:17). So, if we endure (and in the millennium it is enjoyment, not endurance), we shall also reign together (2 Tim. 2:12). Such shall be "accounted worthy to obtain, that age" (whatever they might suffer in this age), and the resurrection from among the dead. They are sons of God being sons of the resurrection. The wicked have no such spiritual relation, and are compelled to rise for judgment at the appointed hour, when that special reign is over, and a large addition is made to their already large ranks from all ages.

But we may go farther. The distinctness of time as well as of character is therefore a weighty part of revealed truth. But it is even to be gathered from a book as ancient as Job (14 and 19). For thence we learn that unlike any vegetable ever shooting "afresh," sinful man as such "lieth down and riseth not; till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep." Not a word of the Lord's coming then; but there is the very significant synchronism of no more heaven, though it be ordinarily less shaken than the earth: the negative and the positive marks precisely agree with

Rev. 20:11, 12. It is the end, not of “the age,” or “this age,” but of the kingdom and of the heavens and earth that now are. Then, and not before, “man” shall be raised. How different that which we read of the saint in Rev. 19! “For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand up at the last on the earth (or dust); and after my skin hath been thus destroyed, yet from (or in) my flesh shall I see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.” This is, we may perhaps say, what is appointed for the saint, and evidently before the heavens and earth are no more. It is the first resurrection, as the other will be the second death. To the greatest of all prophecies, closing (as no other book could so well) the canon of scripture, we are indebted for the exact measure of the kingdom in time; but the difference of the two resurrections, and the priority of that of the saints, are as certainly to be gathered from one of the earliest books of the Old Testament, as from the latest of the New. Even the Pharisees did not question a resurrection of both just and unjust. It was reserved for Christendom to confound both in one general resurrection, though Christ (John 5) and scripture so carefully discriminate them. We have seen by the way, how inexcusable is the assumption that the premillennial advent is taught only in one chapter; but of this perhaps enough has been said already.

Now where is even an approach in any text adduced for the desired inference that the millennium precedes the advent? Not a hint of it appears either here or in any other scripture: let it be produced, if there is one. Every one of these texts admits of the millennium after Christ’s coming; not one intimates such a thing before it. Instead of so blessed a change for the earth, we are warned of a

spoiled crop till harvest-time in the end of the age (Matt. 13), of days like those which brought the judgments in the days of Noah and of Lot (Luke 17), of departure from the faith in the latter times (1 Tim. 4), of seducers waxing worse and worse in the last days, of men having a form of godliness, but denying the power (2 Tim. 3), and of a mystery of lawlessness to work up, on the removal of a restraint, into the lawless one revealed, who draws down, as Mr. B. confesses, the Lord Jesus personally appearing in judgment (2 Thess. 2). If the Gentile did not abide in God's goodness (and who would dare to say he does?), cutting off would ensue, says Rom. 11, not the millennium. To unsophisticated minds such continuous and prevalent iniquity, till the Lord judges the quick at His advent, excludes a millennium, such as scripture describes, or even Dr. Brown's imaginary amelioration of this age before that day. Nay, some of those very scriptures, with a crowd of others, imply the millennium only when Christ is come.

Again, our Lord and His apostles never once speak of a millennial issue of preaching or the like. Where the millennium is spoken of, prophecy invariably declares that divine judgments introduce it. Compare Isa. 1:24-31; Isa. 2; Isa. 4; Isa. 9:4-7; Isa. 11:4-9; Isa. 24-25; Isa. 59:16-21; Isa. 60-66; Jer. 10:7-25; Jer. 23; Jer. 30; Ezek. 20; Ezek. 38; Ezek. 39; Dan. 2; Dan. 7; Dan. 11; Dan. 12; Hosea 2; Hosea 3; Amos 9; Obadiah 15-21; Micah 4; Micah 5; Nahum 1; Hab. 2; Hab. 3; Zeph. 3:8-20; Haggai 2:6-9, 22, 23; Zech. 2:8-13; Zech. 10; Zech. 12; Zech. 14; Mal. 4. The Psalms as well as the Law might be cited; but this will suffice. The gospel was to be preached in the world for a witness unto all the nations; but for this age not a sound of the world being

converted or even brought as yet to a universal profession of the Lord's name. This is at best unauthorized enthusiasm, the fruit of unconscious presumption in neglect of scripture, which alone can decide the "how" as well as the "what." That the earth is to be full of the knowledge of Jehovah's glory is certain; that preaching or the church is to effect it is not only without, but against, God's word. It is an honour reserved for Christ in person, Who will execute judgment on His enemies, destroy idolatry, expel Satan, bring Israel and the nations to repentance, bless all creation, and reign in power with His glorified saints till the last foe is annulled, when He will give up the kingdom to Him Who is God and Father, that God may be all in all. The eternal state is not the delegated kingdom, though there will be everlasting glory in the new heavens and new earth.

The gospel mission, as it is of God's grace, could not be other than universal in its scope and call; and the infinite work of Christ's atonement demands nothing less. This for the responsibility of the disciples was to disciple all the nations (Matt. 28), but what a very different thing from the effect in man's hand or from God's counsels! Simeon related (says Acts 15) how first God visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. To this agrees the clear and general testimony of the N. T. It is in vain to oppose vague statements, or fanciful interpretations of "the tree" and "the leaven," as if scripture could contradict itself. Our Lord expressly anticipates some as believing, and some as disbelieving (Mark 16); and such was the fact according to the inspired history (Acts 28). God is not in this age proposing universal blessing under Christ's

government in power and glory over the earth; He gathering for heaven saved souls, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, that, when all things are in fact put under Him, they too may be manifested with Him in glory (Col. 3). This will be the millennium. The world-kingdom of our Lord and His Christ will have come (Rev. 11:15).

But the N.T. is made completely inapplicable, if the millennium come ere this age closes and the day of the Lord arrives. For its habitual language is essentially distinctive, and supposes, not all nations flowing to Zion, exalted above the hills, but “sheep in the midst of wolves,” who have to “beware of men” (Matt. 10), a people purified to Himself for His own possession (Titus 2), “a chosen generation” (1 Peter 2), “in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation” (Phil. 2), “all that will live godlily suffering persecution” (2 Tim. 3) — the very opposite of reigning in righteousness, peace, and glory; expressly suffering with Him now, and looking to reign with Him only in “that day.” As the Lord had said in John 16, “in the world ye shall have tribulation.” To him that overcomes now, the promise is by and by to sit with Christ on His throne (Rev. 3), as we see verified in Rev. 20; but this is the millennium of His day. Even when the final testimony in this age goes forth i.e. the everlasting gospel (Rev. 14), the solemn warning that accompanies it is, “for the hour of His judgment is come” (Rev. 14:7). Alas! for the self-flattering unction, that we, or any like us, are the men to make good the millennium by our efforts! This is truly a carnal and unscriptural expectation, which takes fire at true testimony as paralyzing missionary zeal, though obliged to own that none in fact are more zealous than those who look for

Christ's coming before the millennium. In principle, the waiting for the Lord to come in grace and in judgment ought on the face of it to add urgency to our love and labors.

Further, it is a mistake to suppose that the N.T. (save in Rev. 20) is silent about the millennium, if we mean the thing and not the mere word; if only the latter, it is but illusion. The following are but a selection of N.T. scriptures which apply to the millennial day rather than to any other: Matt. 19:28; Luke 1:70-79; Acts 17:31; Rom. 8:19, 23; Rom. 11:26-31; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3; Eph. 1:10; Phil. 2:10, 11; Col. 1:20; 2 Thess. 1:5-10; 2 Tim. 2:12; 4:1; Heb. 2:5-8. The O.T. had so fully described the millennium, and shown it to hinge, not only on the Messiah's presence, but on terrific judgments as introducing it, that there was the less need for the N. T. to dwell on what had been revealed already. To hold out the Lord's coming was therefore the exigency of the truth, if the millennium follows, but scarcely comprehensible if it be conceived to precede. For His coming in due time brings in the heavenly glory, as well as the peaceful reign over the earth, when the war-judgments have overwhelmed the wicked. And the Revelation is exactly the place to give particulars; for only in such a prophetic book could we intelligently expect the full, detailed, and relative order of these stupendous events. This we accordingly find with a precision and completeness, as well as unity, found nowhere else in the compass of inspiration, whatever rationalism may object to. No wonder it is called The Revelation. But dark unbelief casts its shadow over its pages, and would, if it could, convert it into the enigma

of man, instead of owning it the solution of our Lord Jesus.

Why too, in comparing the Fourth Gospel with the Synoptists, refer to John 14:18 (p. 24), and say nothing of the opening of the same chapter, where Christ's proper coming is set forth, not with earthly signs, but with heavenly blessings beyond any other? One might as fairly set Matt. 16:28, Mark 8:38, Luke 9:27, against the prophecies of His advent in each Gospel and say that "His words here are not accompanied by any of the many and constant associations which mark, both in the Gospels and Epistles, the visible return of Christ at the last day." Is mystification sought? What else is the aim? In John 14:1-3 the truth of His coming is revealed in its strict personality and heavenly aspect as our hope at least as distinctly as elsewhere. In John 5:28, 29, the resurrection had been shown to be, not simultaneous, but fundamentally distinguished as twofold, a resurrection of life, and a resurrection of judgment, whilst ver. 25 is decisive that "hour" may be long enough to let in a thousand years and more. So in John 6 (not to speak of John 11:24) "last day" can be no difficulty. And where is a previous millennium supposed in any of these scriptures?

It may have been the unhallowed wish of the multitude in John 6, who owned Jesus as the prophet that should come, and desired to make Him a King, as the fulfiller of Ps. 132:15. But what would it have been but a carnal millennium on this side of death? Now it is the very aim of the Lord Jesus to make known that, instead of any present blessing by His reign now, He was come from heaven, and incarnate, to give the believer eternal life and resurrection at the last day, feeding meanwhile on

His flesh, and drinking His blood. Thus a millennium is excluded till the last day comes and the righteous join Christ, for the display of His glory in the universe according to prophecy; as the apostle connects the raising of the saints with inheriting the kingdom (1 Cor. 15), where the words rendered “then” simply indicate subsequence; whether long or short, depends wholly on other facts or statements, as do the words “hour” and “day.” So 1 Thess. 4 speaks only of the dead and living saints at Christ’s coming; but how does any one of these scriptures, I say not involve, but admit of, the millennium before the second advent? If the millennium follow, their bearing is plain enough, though man’s mind can easily suggest difficulties.

It may not be unseasonable to repeat that the N.T. says so much the less of the millennium, because it occupies so large a place in the O.T. The promises to the fathers (Genesis passim) suppose that time as the season of their most manifest fruition, however truly faith takes them up now in Christ. But it will hardly be contested that the Abrahamic inheritance of the world will then be enjoyed more distinctly than at any other period. So, in the prophecy of Jacob (Gen. 49), the gathering or obedience of the peoples to Shiloh looks onward to that day. Without dwelling on more debatable witness in the types of Ex., Lev., Num., etc., we may refer to the Psalms as running over with intimations beyond mistake. Take, among others, Ps. 2, 8, 22, 45, 72, 93-101, 110, 117, 118, 132, to say nothing of the concluding Hallelujah Psalms.

Still richer thus, if possible, were the prophets. Isaiah is almost too familiarly known in this connection to call for many words. But we may notice that, after appeals to

conscience and heart, Isa. 1:24-31 speaks of the Lord suddenly intervening in judgment to bring in righteousness for the chosen people; as Isa. 2 shows it will be the same principle and result for the nations. It is the kingdom by and by, not the gospel now, idolatry vanishing only in that great day. Is it possible that spiritual men can confound with the gospel “the spirit of judgment,” and the “spirit of burning “ (Isa. 4) by which the Lord is to purge the blood of Jerusalem? Then follows manifested glory upon Zion. Such will be the character of that future reign. Meanwhile, Israel having stumbled at the Stone of stumbling — Messiah in humiliation, the testimony is bound up, the law sealed, among His disciples — the children given to Christ Whom the prophet represents, signs and wonders, while Jehovah hides His face from Jacob (Isa. 8). If this, according to Heb. 2, applies now, Isa. 9 is no less explicit that the end of the age will see the intervention of His glorious power, when He breaks the rod of the oppressor, and Israel rejoice before Him. Then will they wake up from their long and fatal sleep, and joyfully own “Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful,” etc. And so one might pursue the theme throughout.

A mourner over Judah’s sins and judgments as Jeremiah was, none the less does he point to the kingdom fully in chs. 3, 16, 23, 30-33. Ezekiel too is not silent on this head: chs. 16, 17, 20, 28, 34, 36, 38. Daniel shows us, as the issue of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and of his own visions, the kingdom of God consequent on a judgment that extirpates the Gentile powers, rather than a description of that kingdom. On the so-called Minor

Prophets we need not dwell. Speaking generally, they bear witness to the same glorious result on earth, as does the O.T. as a whole. It is neither heaven nor eternity, but Messiah's reign.

The N.T. confirms the Old in this fully; but it does more and better. To us it opens heaven and higher hopes, which gradually grew into brightness in the rejected Messiah glorified as man on high, and there made head over all things to the church which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:22, 23). Hence, save for special purposes, it is the heavenly side of the kingdom, on which the O.T. is all but silent, whereas it becomes the prominent and characteristic testimony of the N.T. The earthly side was in no way denied, but rather disappeared in the incalculably superior glory of what has now come fully to view. Yet, painful to say, it is this special privilege for the Christian to enjoy in hope, consequent on Christ's accomplished redemption and the gift of the Spirit, which appears to stumble some of our brethren. For the N.T. says no more than is requisite of the earth by and by: the aim is to insist on heaven in a way and measure which is quite new; and therefore Christ's coming, to receive us to Himself and give us a place with Himself in the Father's house above, becomes the distinctive keynote. But the Christian does not therefore lose his part in the kingdom, though the heavenly hope helps to explain more clearly the exalted relation he is to have in reigning with Christ at that day.

The Father's kingdom will come where the risen saints shine like the sun; and His will be done on earth as in heaven, because the glorious Son of man will hold the reins of power (Satan being bound), and the angels of

His might gather out of His kingdom (clearly the earth) all scandals and those that do lawlessness (Matt. 13). Then, and then only, are the saints to judge the world, yea, angels (1 Cor. 6), as the apostles sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19). It is a state of things surely to be fulfilled, but as surely neither in this age nor in eternity, but in the age between, when all things, the habitable world to come among them (Heb. 2:5-8), will be seen put under Christ, as they cannot be now or when the kingdom is given up (1 Cor 15:25-28). It is to be feared that those who find it incredible that God's kingdom should consist of earthly and of heavenly things to be displayed together at Christ's manifestation, when we, too, shall be manifested together with Him in glory (Col. 3:4), fall into the kindred unbelief now of excluding from their hearts and their teaching such unearthly and glorious motives. The apostle counted the letting in of this heavenly light on common matters most desirable, wholesome, and influential. It did not occur to him that real Christians would object to the divine scheme of the kingdom, because Christ will be the displayed Head of all things in heaven and of all things on the earth (Eph. 1:10). The objectors are not indeed Sadducees; but unbelief as far as it goes joins saints in bad companionship. Together they err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.

And the consequence of this unbelief has been disastrous from early days to our own. The low chiliastic views of the second and third centuries, which fell back on the Jewish hope of the earth at Christ's coming, were met for the most part by the allegorizing interpretation, which assumed a reign of the gospel and of the church, either already or at a future day. The purpose of God to

put the universe heavenly and earthly under Christ was given up by both to the unspeakable loss of the saints, and sad slight of their Lord. Under this error lie our brethren today. Even Dr. B., who differs from most of his friends by looking for all Israel's inbringing as a leading feature of the latter day, nullifies its distinctiveness by his usual argument of less now and more then, so as to assimilate all and deny a new age or dispensation. This vagueness dissolves the power of the truth: else he must feel that the nature of the church as the one body of Christ wherein is neither Jew nor Gentile forbids, and is inconsistent (as long as it is in process of building) with, the inbringing of all Israel. But this he does not see, because he, as much as those who reject Israel's hope, ignores the special calling and character of the church. Now according to scripture it is not the merging of all Israel in the church which is predicted; but, along with their conversion, prophecy points out their restoration to more than pristine glory and blessedness under Messiah and the now covenant; and this, to be the head of the nations on earth, when the glorified reign over it from their heavenly seats with Christ.

When the church ceased to affirm the future prospects of Israel on earth, she along with this lost sight of her own heavenly hopes, and began to seek ease, honour, and power here below, and naturally perverted the prophecies to this end. At length she substituted herself so completely for the ancient people of God, that she dreamed Jerusalem and Zion, Judah and Israel, to be only so many varying expressions of her own glory, either now or at a future day. For another age characterized by Christ's presence and reign was now become intolerable. As long as (alas! how briefly) the

church walked in the living hope of her own heavenly association with Christ's glory, she also confessed God's immutable mercy for Israel here below; that at Christ's coming He might have the glorified with Himself above, and concurrently therewith His earthly people, the channel and means of the universal spread of His name among all nations broken by judgments, and under the Spirit's latter rain, Satan being banished from his wonted haunts.

The prevalent view betrays the usual symptoms of unbelief. It does not face a quantity of plain scriptural testimony. It occupies itself with exaggeration of others or with its own difficulties and objections, not positive truth. It neglects the scriptures which tell us clearly how the kingdom is to come. It is based on the assumption of human progress in the face of the clearest warnings of failure increasing till Christ come. It hides its self-confidence under the plea of the Spirit in and by man working Christ's cause to ultimate triumph. It denies the divine purpose of putting all things visibly under Christ, and the glorified saints on high with Israel and all nations blessed here below before eternity come. It banishes the King from His kingdom, for His bride to enjoy it if she can in His absence, and insists on keeping Satan in his bad eminence, spite of the strongest assurance to the contrary. To what is such obstinate incredulity due? Were the eye single to Christ's personal glory (not "His cause" in our hands), the whole body would be full of light, instead of the confusion this error breeds for this and almost every other truth.

It is false that Christ's second coming "will be at once followed by the final separation of the good and bad, and by the eternal glory" (p. 135), and that consequently the

millennium cannot follow it. Our Lord, to correct the thought that the kingdom of God was about to be manifested immediately, spoke parabolically (Luke 19) of going to a distant country (heaven) to receive for Himself a kingdom and to return. His servants (Christians) meanwhile trade with His money; His citizens (the Jews), not content with rejecting Him as they were already doing unto the death of the cross, send a messenger after Him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. All this (in spite of Peter's call in Acts 3) was punctually fulfilled in the murder of Stephen, sent after Christ as it were with that insulting message. So indeed it was shown in the Acts at large and the N. T. generally. But when Christ comes back again, having received (not given up) the kingdom, He awards to His servants for the kingdom authority over this or that, and utter loss for such as make no use of what was given; He also executes judgment on the rebellious people. All this will be as surely fulfilled. But it is in no respect the great white-throne judgment for the lake of fire, nor the eternal glory of Rev. 21:1-8 when He shall give up the kingdom to Him Who is God and Father. It is what the apostle had in view when he charged Timothy by (or testified both) Christ's appearing and His kingdom (1 Tim. 4:1); for He is to judge not dead only at the end, but quick at the beginning and in one form or another all through the kingdom. Reigning in righteousness is the characteristic display then; and we shall share His throne.

The post-millennial system misapplies or excludes that grand prospect which the apostle was inspired to open out to us in Eph. 1:10; Phil. 2:10, 11; Col. 1:20. For, though there be results for eternity, the millennium will

be the blessed manifestation before the universe of the Savior's triumph. What grace does now is in no way the administration of the fullness of times; nor will eternity be anything of the kind, for Christ shall deliver up the kingdom and Himself be subject to Him that did subject all things unto Him, that God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

The millennium is not a characteristic period of conflict between good and evil, however changed the conditions. It is a reign of righteousness on earth, Christ and His glorified saints reigning together over it. It is the heavenlies, no longer infested by spiritual wickednesses, but purged for ever, and filled with those who were once the slaves of Satan, bearing in their risen bodies the image of His glory. It is the heavenly Jerusalem, reflecting from on high, not glory only, but that same spirit of grace (Rev. 22:2) in which those who compose it once walked on earth by faith: the beautiful contrast of the earthly Jerusalem which in that day will still be the witness and instrument of unsparing righteousness (Isa. 60:12). Then more fully will be seen the truth of the great Melchizedek, not only in person and title but in the exercise of His priesthood, when He will bless man with the blessing of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth; and bless the Most High God Who will have delivered the enemies into the hand of the faithful. Heaven and earth will no more stand severed and opposed through sin; nor will it be merely grace in Christ from heaven shining for all that they may believe, and on believers as they feebly pursue their pilgrim path; but heaven and earth shall form the harmonious theater of suited glory. "For there are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial; but the glory of the

celestial is one, and that of the terrestrial is another." "And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith Jehovah, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel (Hosea 2:21-22).

Eternity is not an "administration" or stewardship, as this will be; nor is it true as a fact yet, but, a revealed purpose for that intervening day "to sum (or head) up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth" — "in Him in Whom we also obtained an inheritance," having been foreordained according to His purpose. For we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. During this evil age Satan is the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2), the god of this age, who beguiled its rulers to crucify the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2). This, however, only gave occasion to the mystery concerning Christ and concerning the church. While Christ sits exalted head over all things at God's right hand, the Holy Spirit is sent down to gather out and together the members of the one body, the sons of glory; so that, when He comes again, having received the kingdom, they too may reign with Him. Then the earth will be judicially cleansed from its defilement, and the ancient people of God in repentance welcome their once rejected but now glorified Messiah, and thus take their destined place, though on the ground of pure mercy, as the head of all nations and families of the earth, at length blessed under the sway of the only worthy One.

In the eternal universe there will be no more sea (Rev. 21:1). For the millennial state it is written, "Let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills be joyful before Jehovah; for He cometh to judge

the earth: with righteousness shall He judge the world and the peoples with equity." It is the kingdom of God before being given up. Then will creation be, not burnt up as at the end, but delivered; for the revelation of the sons of God is come; and as they are no longer waiting for the adoption, the redemption of the body, creation groans no more, but is set free from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of God's children (Rom. 8). It is the day of the displayed glory of the Second Man, and His manifested triumph over Satan, not the conflict, but the kingdom; and when this (not the strife) draws towards its close, Satan is loosed for a little time, but for a great moral lesson, after which he is overwhelmed and tormented forever. Then only will be the eternal state.

Then will the world, not "believe," as it ought, now, that the Father sent the Sea (John 17:21), but "know " that the Father did send Him and love the saints on high as He loved Christ (v. 23); for will they not then shine in the same heavenly glory? For the glory which the Father gave Christ, Christ gave them (v. 22), now first said to be "perfected into one," as indeed cannot be till then. This is the perfection of supernatural interference, the very reverse of "heaven and hell withdrawing from the field, and leaving it to the inherent power of principles as manifested in human life on earth," as Dr. Edwards erroneously thinks (p. 73).

Dr. Edwards writes for the most part calmly. Yet with an adequate knowledge of scripture one cannot yield to his thoughts or his reasoning.

It is true, as a matter of course, that the advent of the Messiah is first shown in the O.T. (p. 63), and that only

after His rejection by the Jews was His second advent discerned clearly from the first. But it is a mistake that the second advent is ever represented in the N.T., as introducing “the eternal reign of God when Christ shall have delivered the mediatorial kingdom to the Father” (p. 64). The age to come is ignored between the end of this age and the eternal day. Nor does scripture leave room for a third advent, which cannot therefore be postulated.

That the end of (not this age, but) the world and the judgment of the dead will be ushered in by an advent of our Lord Jesus, is certainly opposed to the N. T. Rev. 20 is absolutely silent about His advent, because it has been already described in Rev. 19, and what follows consists of its results. There are no quick (living) to be judged after fire from God has devoured the rebellious nations (Rev. 20:7-9); so that the judgment in vv. 11-15 consists solely of the dead, and we may add of the wicked, who, if we believe our Lord in John 5:24, exclusively come into judgment, as these do. They are judged according to their works, which for a sinner is perdition. The books according to the figure employed bore witness of their deeds; the book of life had none of their names. Divine sovereignty was silent; their works confessed the justice of their doom. If Christ must appear to judge quick and dead, it cannot be at the end of the kingdom, because there is no earth to come to, any more than quick to judge. According to the express terms of the vision, earth and heaven will have fled away, and no place be found for them. The dead stand before the throne; but it is neither the earth nor yet the heaven as far as we know, for they are then gone. It is a going of the dead to be judged by Christ, not in any

sense His coming, which is a fabulous interpolation for that time. His true advent for the judgment of the quick is in Rev. 19:11, not in Rev. 20:11, when it is no longer possible, as in fact it is not so written.

As to “inherent improbability” (pp. 65-67), no argument can be more precarious. The nature of the case implies a divine intervention unexampled in the past. The only question for a believer is, What saith the scripture? The first coming of our Lord was no mere link in the chain of the world’s history; nor will His second coming be. The one was God’s humiliation in Christ’s person in grace; the other will be in Him man’s exaltation in glory. That both are above “development” is simple to faith, whatever be the speculations of philosophy. The atonement of Christ is not more the answer to a guilty conscience, than it is God thereby glorified even in the face of sin; and the kingdom will be the display of His victory before the universe to the joy of all the once groaning creation, the blessing of long deceived and benighted man, the glorified enjoying the reward of fidelity — in their reign with Christ as they once suffered with Him. Yet Dr. E. asks, “What is gained by a millennium?” and answers, “Apparently, nothing; absolutely nothing.” This is really too dense.

The new age, however necessarily distinct from all before, is a stewardship, an economy. It will have its peculiar object — for Christ to put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. Though He has the title already (Head over all things, which God has put under His feet), He is not yet making good that title against His enemies. While sitting at the right hand of God, and on the Father’s throne, He is acting as priest, etc., for

His friends, till God makes His enemies His footstool. Then He will come, having received the kingdom, rule in the midst of His enemies, and strike through kings in the day of His wrath. It is a new age marked by its own special principles and ways, wholly distinct from what He or we are doing now, when He is gathering the co-heirs who are associated with Himself in a heavenly way for His reign over the earth at His coming.

Is it not profane to speak of this holy and glorious kingdom of Christ and His own, as wearing the appearance of an immense demonstration, like the triumph of a Caesar? Such a comparison one might understand from the lips of a Festus, who regarded the revelation of God as questions of superstition, and of one Jesus which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

“It neither grows out of the intellectual and spiritual condition of the human race, nor leads to higher attainments intellectual or spiritual” (p. 66). It is the purpose of God to glorify the Lord Jesus and those who have in faith shared His sufferings, not only as now in Himself on high, but from out of the heavens over the earth, placed as it has never yet been in fact under His scepter.

But Dr. E. should not speak as he does both of the millennial reign, and of the short space that follows: For a time it burns like a fierce light to be quenched in utter darkness; again, however, to blaze out in final and unending day (p. 66). Satan expelled, Israel and all nations blessed, creation delivered, Christ and His own that are changed reigning over the earth, the Most High God possessor of heaven and earth united and in peace, and He Who was erst crucified bearing up the pillars of

God’s glory: can anything be more worthy of Christ, or more in accordance with God’s word? Otherwise a vast deal of scripture in O. and N.T. is reduced to a blank, which again obscures both this age and eternity, with which in that case its contents are more or less confounded.

No prospect so desirable both for Christ and for the race. God occupies Himself with the glory of Christ, which will not fail. The millennium is no mistake, but a revealed and splendid chapter in God’s story of the universe. In Adam man fell and died; in Christ man will be made alive and blessed. Israel under law became ruined and scattered to every land; under Christ their King, and the new covenant, they will yet be gathered and maintained in peace, and joy, and honour. The nations invested with imperial authority became “beasts,” as Daniel calls them, till the last, in the blasphemous pride of its chief, brings down the Son of man’s judgment in His kingdom, when all peoples, nations, and languages shall serve Him. The church, saved by grace, and the responsible witness on earth now to Christ glorified on high, being united to Him by the Holy Spirit, has proved unfaithful and corrupt, as the professing mass will assuredly fall into the apostasy, when the man of sin shall provoke the vengeance of the Lord, no less than the self-exalting civil head; but none the less will Christ present to Himself the church glorious, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and unblemished. Now the millennium will be the “immense demonstration” of all this and more before the world; but as unlike a Caesar’s triumph, as a man of dust differs from the Lord of glory. If there were no

millennium, what a gap in God's ways and in the display of His counsels!

That the world-kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ shall come at the close of this age, and last for a long but terminable period constituting the new age, before "the end" or eternity begins, is no difficulty to a true-hearted believer accustomed to bow to scripture, and on his guard against tradition. And the insurrection of the distant nations after the thousand years are over, when Satan is let loose for the last temptation, simply shows that it is an age or dispensation when man is tried under quite new conditions and for the last time. Would the experience of a thousand years of righteousness, peace, and outward blessing, under the glorious reign of Christ and the heavenly saints, endear God to the race as such, so that then they would reject the deceit of Satan?

To this the answer of God's word by the little space (Rev. 20:7-10) is, that the race (however controlled to their own immense advantage, with every mercy around them through the infinitely beneficent and mighty One Who held the reins and shed the blessing) only needs the active temptation of Satan to turn and rebel once more at God. Nothing but to be born of God can avail. They submitted in Satan's absence, when it was their own interest to render such obedience as it was, and when every transgression paid a just and speedy penalty. There was no temptation; and all was good around, and abundantly too. In such a state they could not be God's people, and He their God, for the new heavens and the new earth. Satan's temptation, unless God must or would convert them all, was precisely the due way to test them, as the race had been, if otherwise, always tested before; and they fall to their ruin at the first trial

of Satan, as did man from the beginning. Is it godly, is it intelligent, is it decent, first to blot out the truth of the scriptural millennium, and then to stigmatize its freedom from social conflict, and its “reign in holiness and profound peace for a thousand years,” as a state to which “the actual history of the world is infinitely preferable” (p. 67)? Truly “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). “By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matt. 12:37).

It is ignorance and unbelief to regard the millennium as earthly alone. The distinctive truth is that, both heaven and earth will be in blessed nearness of harmony under Christ and the risen saints. And here it may be well to observe that the chief, perhaps only, N.T. semblance of proof for the earth exclusively is the misrendering of Rev. 5:10, where it is painful to see the error of the A.V. reproduced by the Revisers (of 1881). For the usage, as far as appears, is that with words of authority or rule ἐπὶ indicates the sphere ruled over, ἐν the place in which the ruler lived. There is a shade of difference between gen. dat. and accus., but none as to the general fact that they express the subject of rule, not the ruler’s abode. It will be seen, in the Books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, for instance, that the locality of the king is regularly expressed by ἐν, the sphere by ἐπί. This being so, the true rendering is “over,” not “on.” Those who have given the latter have adopted a legitimate force of the preposition generally, not its meaning when modified by the connected βασ. The millennial reign then is heavenly, but over the earth, where Israel and the nations do not reign but are reigned over.

Every one fairly informed on the question knows that the N.T. assumes the O.T. revelation of God on the millennium, but it is almost exclusively on the earthly side. The N.T. is not “more authoritative” (p. 69), but it adds very fully the connection with the heavens under the risen Christ, Heir of all things. Still, while the coming of the Lord is put forward prominently, the kingdom is in no way hidden in the N.T. nor even in the Epistles to the Thessalonians. “The kingdom” implies Christ’s coming to reign over the earth. In 1 Thess. 2:12 the apostle speaks of God calling to this, as an encouragement to walking worthily of God; and 2 Thess. 1 shows the enemy had taken advantage of their persecutions and afflictions to say that the day of the Lord was arrived. The apostle, even before he dissipates this delusion, treats their troubles, on the contrary, as a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, “that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which ye also suffer.” It is clearly the millennial reign with Christ which was suggested. And this is the more evident from v. 10, where it is said that Christ “shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at in all them that believed.” The world will then know by the glory in which Christ and His own shall be manifested, that the Father sent the Son and loved them as He loved Him. This is the millennium, not the eternal scene in the new heaven and new earth.

The next argument of Dr. E. on 2 Thess. 2 (pp. 69, 70), like some of Prof. B.’s, goes against the millennium, whether before or after Christ’s return. Now it is quite true, that what the apostle says excludes the millennium before He appears to destroy the lawless one. Here we are cordially agreed. But where is there the shadow of a

reason against a subsequent thousand years of peace? More extraordinary still is the next statement:

The impression left on the reader's mind is that Christ's reign is a long conflict with evil, which in the end embodies itself in the person of the lawless one, whose defeat brings the war to a close. A similar misconception appears in Prof. B.'s paper (p. 28). The impression given by the chapter is that the open outbreak and God-defying pride of the lawless one brings the Lord from heaven to annul him by the shining forth of His presence. This coalesces not only with Rev. 19:11-21, but with Isa. 11:4; both of which are followed beyond controversy by the millennial reign. After that reign is over, Satan is let loose for a special and needed sifting of the unrenewed masses of millennial Gentiles, and judgment falls from God's fire, not from Christ's appearing, without a semblance of the lawless one at that epoch. And no wonder: he had been destroyed irretrievably a thousand years before. Not the lawless one but Satan leads afterwards.

On 1 Cor. 15:25 one need say little; for it is agreed that the verse speaks of Christ reigning. But not a word implies that it "has already begun." The verse does imply that God will have set Christ's enemies as a footstool for His feet to trample down. Is it seriously argued that Christ is actively subduing His enemies now, as He will when the kingdom comes? As to really vanquishing them, He is quiescent now: all His activities are of grace in converting foes, and nourishing, etc., friends; and this, because the members of His body, the church, are not complete. The marriage of the Lamb takes place in heaven, before He appears in judgment of His open foes (the lawless one first of all), and enters on

the reign where all things are to be subjected to Him in fact, as they are now in title. But the reigning is when the dispensed power is in full and public operation before the universe. When that is done, not only in the millennial reign, but by the judgments which precede, and the still more solemn eternal judgment that follows, then the Son shall also Himself be subjected to Him that subjected all things to Him, the kingdom is surrendered, and God is all in all. So far from there being no hint, there is a pointed reference to the millennial reign in the latter half of 1 Cor. 15:24 and the whole of v. 25.

But Dr. E. makes up for such shortcomings by his open admission (pp. 71, 72) that the figurative interpretation of Rev. 20:1-10, for which Dr. Brown and Prof. Beet contend keenly as a question of life or death, "completely breaks down." Nay more, he frankly accepts the interpretation that finds in the passage the doctrine of two resurrections, and that a long period, symbolically designated a thousand years, comes between the resurrection of the saints and that of the rest of the dead. What is there to contend about after such an admission? the plain Christian may ask in surprise. That the millennium is a governmental system, and for a time only, in Christ's hands, is the point. It is not the perfection of the new heaven and earth, when rule is over.

"This passage (adds Dr. E.) contains no hint that Christ comes before the thousand years begin... But St. Paul plainly tells us that the saints are raised at Christ's coming (1 Cor. 15:23). In this respect, that is, in reference to the resurrection of the saints, I infer that the advent is premillennial. Beyond this I cannot see that the passage supports the millennial theory." It

appears to me that a premillennialist must be hard to please who cannot see in this admission Dr. E.'s surrender of the post-millennial view; nor can I doubt that his two negative coadjutors must have been scandalized by a confession so distinct and positive, if not complete. To hold that Christ comes from heaven to raise the saints a thousand years and more (symbolically or literally) before He raises the rest of the dead, and yet that He does not then reign, and does not bring in times of restoring all things, though so full of prophetic testimony and therefore of such interest to God and His children, and that the world is not to know the wonders of God's love to Christ and those that were His in days of suffering, and that there is to be no accomplishment of God's purpose for administration of the fullness of times, no heading up of all things in Christ, both heavenly and earthly (Eph. 1:10), in which we are to share the inheritance with Him: — to hold what Dr. E. allows, and to deny, as he does, these glorious consequences of Christ's coming, is to present as remarkable a group of inconsistencies as one can expect to see in a man of ability. In this judgment Prof. Beet and Dr. Brown would agree against Dr. E., unless I am greatly mistaken. One can but deplore the violence done thereby to the texture of scripture, and the impotence to which even the truth confessed is thus reduced.

The fact is, however, that our negative brethren are singularly at war with each other on vital questions. Thus Prof. Beet will have it, as the teaching of very many statements, by various sacred writers... that the coming of Christ will for ever end the conflict of good and evil (p. 140). Such is his main position. This is directly at issue with Dr. Edwards, who holds that Christ comes to

raise the saints for heaven where they will reign with Him, before the millennium (or a thousand years symbolical before the rest of the dead are raised, Satan being meanwhile bound and cast into the bottomless pit). Yet he also holds that the thousand years, far from being a time of holy peace, are a continuation of the conflict between good and evil, but under changed conditions... Heaven and hell withdraw from the field to leave it to the inherent power of principles, as manifested in human life on earth (p. 73). Thus all is avowedly reduced to a human level and order, beyond any dealing of God in the past!

"The conflict assumes apparently a more human character!" and this, after confessing Christ come, the saints raised, and Satan bound!! Of course Dr. B., as well as Prof. B., wholly reject all these features of Dr. E.'s wonderful millennium. "A more human character" is only true, if the all-important place of the risen Head and the risen saints is owned, not "withdrawn" but from heaven controlling the earth for good, as never before, and ruling the nations with a rod of iron, in contrast with the gospel. The loosing of Satan after the thousand years, and his successful seduction of men far and wide on earth (for be never gains the place of accuser in heaven, as we know him), will only the more bring out that all flesh is grass; for it might have been thought an "inherent improbability" for such as judged from the unbroken peace, righteous government, and visible glory, of that unparalleled period. But flesh ensnared even then by Satan is devoured by fire coming down out of heaven; and heaven and earth are dissolved and vanish away for Christ's judgment of the dead, who are cast into the lake of fire; and new heavens and a new

earth appear wherein righteousness dwells, and God (not the exalted Man) is all in all.

For Dr. B. here, and more fully in his Second Advent, contends for a millennium which only differs from this age by an increase of the good now at work, and a diminution of the evil, with scarce one thing adequately answering to the visions of the kingdom as set forth in both Old and New Testaments alike. Dr. B. indeed does not argue like Prof. Beet, as if the passage in Rev. 20:1-9 stood alone and at issue with every other in the N. T. The chief thing peculiar to that passage in fact is defining the length of the kingdom; and where in the N. T. could that measure be given so fittingly as in its one great prophecy? The kingdom itself is most fully described in the Old Testament as well as less so in the New. Dr. B. does not question, as Prof. B. seems to do, the sphere of the reign with Christ (pp. 30, 146). They do indeed join arms in throwing doubt over its being a resurrection of the saints. One of them calls it an unproved assertion that the prophet speaks (in v. 4) of three classes, i.e., of the saints in general, besides the twofold Apocalyptic martyrs; another assumes that they are only martyrs.

In truth Prof. B. leaves it doubtful as far as appears (and I should abhor misjudging him or any other), whether he believes in a millennium at all, save possibly “a fresh departure greater and better even than the Reformation” (pp. 34, 35)! And he widely differs in the hasty assertion that “the visions of Daniel refer always to the eternal glory “ (p. 33). Dr. B. on the contrary, with no less confidence, maintains the opposite error that the first vision (and the same principle applies no less to the last) is not even a new dispensation, but only a final step of the same unbroken dispensation as the present (pp.

119-121)! Thus both ignore “the age to come” in flat opposition to scripture. Again, Dr. B., in his aversion to the natural interpretation of Rev. 20:4-6, which Dr. E. admits it is impossible to evade, dwells on the symbolical and difficult nature of the Revelation, with almost every possible interpretation advanced, and the varieties of understanding this very passage among its literal interpreters (pp. 107, 108). Now what matters all this cloud of dust, if he is sure it is inspired, and that the Holy Spirit enables him to understand its genuine meaning? When people are so full of others’ uncertainties, can one trust their own assurance? Prof. Beet goes farther still, and does what he can to take up the old scepticism which those who shrunk from Rev. 20:1-10 fell into respecting even its genuineness (pp. 137, 138). But no man ever quarreled with the Apocalypse, unless the Apocalypse gave no quarter to his own idols. There is no book of scripture more self-evidently of God.

As far as appears, Dr. E. symbolizes with the late Prof. Moses Stuart, who believed in a first resurrection literally, and yet adhered to the traditional view of a general resurrection before the great white throne. But this amalgam is incoherent, and the exegesis unsatisfactory, even to the Andover expositor himself; as every comment must be which is not based on two distinct resurrections, of the just, and of the unjust. A general resurrection, or a universal judgment, is opposed to God’s word, and fraught with perplexity and error.

Dr. Brown, after some prefatory words of no concern here, begins with 2 Peter 3:10-13. His fundamental mistake is the assumption that the day of the Lord is the

equivalent of the Second Advent. Now any careful reader of the O.T. may see that “that day” includes a vast variety of divine dealings, and is a period, not an epoch. It begins (not with the Lord’s presence or coming (i.e., the rapture) at all, which is positively and plainly contra-distinguished from it in 2 Thess. 2:1, 2, as we have already shown, but) with His judicial dealings on earth (beginning with His appearing in glory); which judgments, in one form or another, occupy the kingdom for more than 1000 years, till it is delivered up at the end. This is the simple truth of the day of the Lord, apart from controversy; and it thus completely disposes of the difficulty. The dissolution of the universe is near the close of that day, but still within it, which is just what the apostle states (see 2 Peter 3:7-13, JND translation). Dr. B. perplexes himself by taking for granted that it is at the beginning. His argument in pp. 91-93 is wholly invalid.

The earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up; the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat; but all that the apostle Peter determines is, that it is “in” that day (v. 10) and by reason of it (v. 12). It was not to be before, nor yet after, but within (the day of the Lord), and because of the presence of, the day of God (i.e., the eternal state). The Apocalypse of John adds, where alone we ought to expect distinct details in their relative order, that this same destruction of heaven and earth is to be only just before the end. No wonder therefore that those who cling to the postmillennial theory decry the inspired book which demolishes it. The burning up and sweeping away are just before the day (of the Lord) ends, which had been running its course for more than a

thousand years, an ample period for all that scripture predicts or premillennialists say. Nor is it true that the warning to the scoffers is pointless. If they ask, “Where is the promise of His coming?” the apostle answers with “the day of the Lord” and its overwhelming terrors, which will destroy the ungodly at the beginning, but will not end before the heavens and earth that now are pass away: the fitting and full reply of God to the scornful scepticism which took its stand against His word on the (alleged) stability of the visible creation. The day will come as a thief, nor will it terminate till every word is accomplished. Dr. B.’s argument cannot survive the touch of scripture.

Just as vain is his reasoning on John 6, and the kindred texts in pp. 94-96. The Lord will assuredly raise up all the dead saints, and change the living ones, to be caught up together in clouds to meet the Lord in the air; but this leaves all open as to any who may be born of God afterwards during the day of the Lord, when Messiah’s praise shall be of God “in the great congregation,” and “all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord, and all the kingdoms of the nations shall worship before Thee.” It is absurd to ignore the harvest of the millennial earth, necessarily distinct from the saints who compose the first resurrection. They that are Christ’s are to be raised at His coming; but how unreasonable, as well as unscriptural, to fancy that Christ has none to bless in the day of His power and joy! Texts which speak of saints past or present do not shut out the “generation” to come. Psalms and Prophets speak distinctly of saints in that day on the earth. That they die not proves they will not be raised; that they do not suffer with Christ indicates that they are not to reign

with Him in that day, for they will be reigned over; but as nothing forbids the gracious quickening of the Spirit in that day, so they will have their blessed portion in the eternal state. A premillennialist must be a simpleton to be perplexed by a conclusion as unsound as the premise is negligent of scripture.

In pp. 97, 98 follows a string of texts (Matt. 10:32, 33; John 5:28, 29; Rom. 2:6-10, 16; 2 Cor. 5:10) which are cited for simultaneous presentation and judgment of righteous and wicked at Christ's second coming. Not one of them utters a word to that effect. All teach award; none defines the time or way, still less simultaneity. Other scriptures prove that they are wholly apart; one at least defines the long interval. Dr. B. connects Rom. 2:16 with v. 10 and preceding; whereas it really links with v. 12. Again, Acts 17:31 speaks solely of Christ's judging the habitable earth, and not the dead. It is therefore nothing to Dr, B.'s purpose, but proves a different judgment, which the postmillennial scheme ignores. John 5 is so far from indicating a simultaneous judgment, that it proves the believer's portion to be life, in contrast with judgment which awaits the wicked only; so that there are two contrasted resurrections also. Hence in 2 Cor. 5:10 we read that we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ, that each may receive the things done through the body according to what he has done, whether good or bad; but not a hint that it will be for just and unjust at the same time, which is elsewhere shown to be unfounded, yea, contradictory of God's word. Dr. B. is loose and unhappy in his citations.

But what then of Rev. 20:11-15, which is supposed to express clearly the absolute universality of the Last

Judgment? (p. 99.) Can reasoning be feebler? As in Rev. 11:18, and 19:5, “the small and the great” include none beyond those that are named, the God-fearing, so in the passage questioned “the great and the small,” do not go beyond the dead that now stand before the throne for judgment, after the blessed and holy we saw raised 1000 years before to reign with Christ. Dr. B.’s argument really upsets his own conclusion. “The great and the small,” as well as the mention of the sea, death, and Hades, do solemnly mark the universality of the dead left by the first resurrection; but to seek, as is sought, to include those already raised in “the dead,” who now so long after stand before the throne to be judged, seems as opposed to all just interpretation of the chapter and to all scripture, as it is to all sound reasoning. It can only be accounted for by the darkening influence of error, πρῶτον ψεῦδος.

Every one must be manifested before Christ’s Bema, saints and sinners at their respective and due times: the saints already glorified to give account and receive according to their deeds; sinners, as they have violated conscience, transgressed God’s law, or rejected His gospel, to come into judgment, whence none of them can be saved, for they have not life. Hence here it is said (Rev. 20:12) that “ the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books according to their works.” If so, it was and could only be everlasting rain, as inspired David expresses it (Ps. 143:2); and so in the N.T. judgment is contrasted both with life (John 5:24, 29) and with salvation (Heb. 9:27, 28).

Yet my excellent friend Dr. B., after citing the affecting repetition in verse 13 (“and they were judged every man according to their works”), appeals to “the almost

identical language of the Gospels and Epistles already quoted," which do not treat the judgment of the righteous and wicked as one whole. He asks, Are we to believe that Life's book was opened for no other purpose than to show that not one of those then raised and then judged was to be found in it? The answer is, that the text expressly declares that the dead, not some but all, οἱ νεκροὶ, were not merely "made manifest" as all saints are to be, but "judged" also, as no believer is or can be, if we accept the words of our Lord, "out of the things that were written in the books." This is inevitable perdition, as every believer saved by grace through the faith of Christ ought to know.

For what then was or could that "other book" be opened, save to make plain that if God's wrath, long revealed and despised, must take its course righteously, God's sovereignty was neither disappointed nor conflicting? The names of the condemned were not there. Therefore it is not "baldly," but with awful emphasis, added, "And if any one was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire." Not a hint of one who was found written there. The book of life tallied perfectly with the books of deeds. Their works called for God's final punishment; to grace they had been indifferent or actively opposed. I regret that a dear Christian should count it "bald" to believe the divine expression of a most weighty truth — the consistency of sovereign grace with everlasting judgment. And the folly of traditional theology is the more evident; for if the righteous were "nakedly expressed" here or anywhere as sharing the judgment with the wicked, it would contradict the O.T. as well as the New, the Lord no less than the apostle. The error strikes not only at "the most mysterious book

of the N. T.," but at fundamental revelation in general. To say that the believer comes into judgment is at issue with the truth of the gospel itself, and is the mere fruit of reasoning from the assumptions of the natural mind.

It is not true, then, that "the one answer to all this" (p. 101) is the "first resurrection," though it be irreconcilable with the anti-scriptural dream of a last simultaneous judgment of all. For we have seen thus far that there is not an atom of truth in one argument alleged. Now Dr. B. betakes himself to another venerable and widespread error, that the persons raised in this first resurrection are the martyrs exclusively" (p. 102). Two classes, he says correctly enough, are here very definitely specified; but how come he and his friends to overlook the general description which precedes, leaving room for all saints beyond those martyrs? "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given them," — exactly fulfilling what the apostle brought before the unspiritual and forgetful Corinthians (1 Cor. 6). Does not Dr. B. know that the saints (not the martyrs exclusively) shall judge the world? Here is the vision of its accomplishment.

We know from 1 Cor. 15, 1 Thess. 4, 2 Thess. 1, and many other scriptures, that the saints at large, of O. and N.T. alike, are to meet the Lord at His coming (the rapture), and to be with Him in the Father's house on high. This the Revelation, as being characteristically a judicial book, does not describe on any scheme whatever; but it does disclose the glorified saints above ere this, notably the marriage of the Lamb come and His wife (the church assuredly as having made herself ready in Rev. 19. Others are there entering into the joy of heaven, not in that most intimate relation, yet blessed

indeed — they that are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9), not the bride but the guests. It is not faith nor wisdom to slight, or confound, these distinctions of God's word. And it is but a shuffle to evade them under the pretense that it is a question only of interpretation. Not so. The text is plain, too plain for prejudice; and therefore it must be explained away by misusing Rev. 21:2. The bride is not invited to her own wedding; nor are those invited to it the bride. So in Heb. 12:22-24 (where the different objects are marked by καὶ, "and," but neglected in both the Authorized and the Revised Versions), "the church of the firstborn," who are enrolled in heaven, are clearly distinguished from the" spirits of just men made perfect." It is a false system which merges all saints in one throng; and if the O.T. saints are thus distinguished from the assembly of firstborn ones, how much more the saints in the wholly changed conditions of the age to come! Not seeing this, and bent on denying it, Dr. B. (in his Second Advent p. 84) has been betrayed into the stupendous blunder that Heb. 11:40 ("God having provided some better thing concerning us [of the N.T.], that apart from us they [the O.T. saints] should not be made perfect,") means "They without us could not be made perfect, that is, without Christ and the Spirit! whose proper economy ours certainly is." Such is the result of his desperate effort to escape the plain distinction drawn by inspiration between the saints of the O.T. and those of the New.

Now both compose the general mass of saints, which our brethren overlook, as seen by St. John, already occupying thrones in Rev. 20:4, as before seen following Christ out of heaven in Rev. 19:11-14. Compare also Rev. 17:14. When Daniel (Dan. 7:9) beheld the thrones, not

“cast down,” but “set up,” he speaks of no sitter but one, the Ancient of days; when John saw thrones, they were filled by sitters on them, and judgment was given to them. The phrase is purposely general, the better to comprise the undefined body of changed saints just issued out of heaven with Christ in order to reign with Him. But as not a few had suffered unto death in the earlier and later persecutions described in the Apocalypse (Rev. 6:9-11, Rev. 13:7, 15), these, who had been slain subsequently to the rest and were not yet raised, are carefully specified as now alive from the dead, both classes of them, to join the general group already enthroned (Rev. 20:4). No doubt this goes far to put out of court the historicalist notion of the Pagan and the Papal periods; but this is a secondary question of application which may be left to the speculative. Our business now is the true exposition of the text before us; and there is no intelligible ground in its plain terms for doubting that there is first, in the opening clause of verse 4, the general body of those who have part in the first resurrection; then the earlier class of Apocalyptic martyrs; and lastly the later company, for which the earlier were to wait. The last sufferers having been killed even as those before, the two specified classes are now raised in time to join the great bulk of the glorified who had already been seen on the thrones (having been caught up at the rapture), so that they all might reign with Christ a thousand years. Who can fail to see that this is the clear and sure meaning when attention is once fairly drawn to the passage? It was unnecessary to define who filled the thrones (p. 146); for it could not but be the saints answering to the bride and the guests at the marriage supper of the Lamb, who had followed

Him out of heaven for His judgment and reign over the earth.

These form the first and general class (of Rev. 20:4); to which both groups of Apocalyptic sufferers (the martyrs during Daniel's 70th week) were added when raised, as the prophet was given to see. Dr. B. at least expressly admits the two "very definitely specified" classes of martyrs, though he, like many others, has not taken account of the already enthroned saints (of Rev. 4). It is idle to dispute that the verse reveals the general body, with two classes added of special interest in the Apocalypse. It is negligence or prejudice which accounts for the strange oversight of the general clause. What does it matter if the (church) Fathers saw not the wood of that clause in their hasty preoccupation with the trees in the subjoined clauses? What avails parading moderns, whose exegesis was not "strict," but really fanciful in the extreme, or vague and lifeless? There the word of God stands, the test of all interpretation. Disprove what is here given, if mistaken. Let objectors give the exact sense without ignoring its most important introduction.

Dr. E. is right, Dr. B. quite wrong, as to Rev. 20:4-6, which, only if taken literally, corresponds with Rev. 1:6; Rev. 2:10, 11, 26, 27; Rev. 3:21; Rev. 5:10; as it is the sole adequate recompense for such suffering as we see in Rev. 6:9-11, etc. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him"; not His "cause" merely having the upper hand in other persons without Him, but ourselves reigning gloriously with Him.

And here let us observe how unjust is the slight put on the Revelation, as not having equal authority with other books of scripture. Is it to be justly blamed because its

expositors have so differed one from another? There can be no sliding scale among inspired writings. If it be, as the apostle John declares, what the Lord Jesus gave him from God, woe be to the man who contemns it in comparison with other books. As with St. Paul's letters there are things in the Apocalypse hard to be understood; but the amount is excessively overrated. The first five chapters are as plain as most parts of the N. T. So are chs. 7, 10, and even 12-15; chs. 17-22 are so for the most part. Only chs. 6, 8, 9, 11, 16 present serious difficulty in some respects; yet even in these will be found unquestionably edifying matter for souls.

In fact, then, Rev. 20:4 is a comprehensive sketch of the saints risen to reign with Christ. Its peculiarity is, not only that it defines the duration of that reign over the earth before "the end," but that it specifies two added classes of sufferers slain in the crisis which precedes the day of the Lord. Without this vision it could be but dimly seen how those specified would fare; though one might be sure on first principles that all must be well with them. For they were not put to death till after those symbolized by the twenty-four crowned elders were in heavenly glory (Rev. 4); and their slaughter did not cease while the Beast and the False Prophet lived to kill them. Thus they did not survive to enjoy the blessings of Christ's reign over the earth. But by dying for His sake, even so late, they gained immensely instead of losing; for they too, as the vision declares, live and reign with Christ, no less than all that were His raised previously and already seated on thrones. To gainsay this, and on the score of "legitimate principles of interpretation" (pp. 108, 109), where the main entry is omitted, and only the two added items are taken into reckoning, is

carelessness and self-deception as gross, at least, as if one, in describing the British Empire, dwelt only on Scotland and Ireland, and forgot there was such a part of it as England and Wales.

It is well-known that the post-apostolic Fathers till Origen were millenarians. The remains of some and the writings of others, bear ample testimony to early and prevalent conviction of a literal resurrection of the saints, and their reign with Christ for a thousand years. But these ante-Nicene views were but partially true at best, to say nothing of Talmudical reveries that crept in here or there. They looked for a reign and living of the glorified on the earth. They never rose to the height of God's purpose for Christ's glory in the universe. They entered not into the N.T. light in 1 Cor. 15, Eph. 1 and Heb. 2, cast on Ps. 8: the risen Son of man at the head of all creation, not Palestine only nor yet the earth, but "all things that are in the Heavens and on earth"; and the saints till then changed into His glorious likeness at His coming, and associated with Him, the heavenly bride of the Bridegroom. Like their adversaries that followed, they mixed up the (heavenly) hope with the prophetic word; so that dreaded times or expected seasons intercepted the heart's waiting for Christ, and lowered their eyes from heaven to earth.

Then the ruin of the church's testimony grew apace. Origen spread widely his allegorizing system, Dionysius of Alexandria his dialectic, Eusebius of Caesarea his flattery of the powers that then were. At length the influence of Augustine established all but universally in Christendom the so-called spiritual theory, that the first resurrection means regeneration in virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, and that the baptized, if at least

God’s elect, are reigning with Christ ever since He ascended to heaven!! This truly “wild” interpretation not only prevailed before the Reformation, but keeps its ground since among Romanists, as among many of the Protestants who still hold it, save where the yet lower ecclesiastical theory of Grotius proved acceptable, till the Arian Dr. Whitby broached, early in the eighteenth century, his discovery — to spread like wild fire — of a future reign of Christ’s cause on earth, gradually brought about by divine blessing on Christian agencies, but helped on by providential dealings also.

Of the Whitbyite hypothesis Virtringa, though striving to trace a foreign source, was the learned advocate, as Dr. Brown is the chief popularizer and warm special pleader in our day. More plausible in one respect than the Augustinian fancy, it undermines and supplants the revealed hope more fatally, falls in readily with the delusion of human progress, and thus corrupts the faith with an expectation essentially worldly and carnal. In particular, the Grotian idea of an ecclesiastical reign since Constantine left men free to conceive, as did the late Bp. Waldegrave and many other brethren, that the millennium is past, and the little space ebbing out; so that they could look for Christ’s coming without one revealed event between. For all these speculators had alike fallen into the error of identifying His advent with “the end” or the judgment of the Great White Throne. So men like the admirable S. Rutherford or Bp. Hall might be dark indeed as to prophecy; but the hope for them was not so paralyzed, as it became half a century or more afterwards by Whitbyism, which suits perfectly the unbounded self-confidence of the revolutionary liberal movement, the characteristic of the last hundred years.

Scripture, on the contrary, assures of declension and apostasy, the mystery of lawlessness, and the lawless one revealed, whom the Lord Jesus destroys at His appearing (2 Thess 2:8) — the distinct reversal of the Whitbyite expectation, which glorifies present instrumentalities and robs Christ personally of His honour, as it leaves Satan in possession, however reduced.

Take a sample or two of its effects manifest in the in the essays before us, as everywhere else in this school. They all object to what is said to be revealed but once: an irreverent unbelieving notion worthy of all detestation as applied to God's word, nay, unworthy even of honourable men. "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater" (1 John 5:9), says the beloved disciple. "Know ye not" says St. Paul, "that we shall judge angels?" (1 Cor. 6:3). Now this follows the question in v. 2, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" — the same truth, which reappears explicitly in Rev. 20:4-6, as it had with less detail appeared in Dan. 7:18. But if it had been true that the reign of the saints with Christ had been revealed only once, is our judging angels the less credible or important, because we here have it in this single passage? Christ's surrender of the kingdom to the Father is notified only in 1 Cor. 15:24. Is it therefore of dubious import or of insignificant value? Is it not a truth of the utmost consequence, because it draws the line (undivulged in the O.T.) between the millennial reign and eternity? Without it one could not decide, as Prof. Beet and Principal Brown do not yet, the just force of the O.T. prophecies in general and of not a few in the N. T. Hence it is idle on this ground to object to the stoppage of

Satan’s temptations for a thousand years, or to the revolt he stirs up in the little space that follows. Their argument at bottom is blind unbelief, sure only to err, and lead astray all who lean on that broken reed of Egypt.

Again, it is argued in this hazy system that the beginning of the millennium may be as uncertain as the starting-point of the seventy weeks. Now where is the analogy? On the one hand it is a question mainly between the seventh or the twentieth year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, and two commandments not a little resembling. On the other hand, the most tremendous judgments will fall first on the western powers in confederation with the Jews and their king, followed by the destruction of the eastern under their great northern chief, with carnage beyond example in both cases: events which close this age, and open the age to come, or millennial reign. Is it wise to set the easily understood vagueness of one ancient imperial mandate, out of two not unlike, against a crisis of unexampled solemnity and horror, to say nothing of Christ’s appearing, or of the universal peace and blessing that ensues without an enemy or an evil occurrent? The effort to find gradual and successive steps in Dan. 2:44, Dan. 7:26, and 2 Thess. 2:8 is unworthy of sound philology, and contradicts the plain objects of the three texts, which describe nothing else or less than a sudden and complete extinction. Consuming in a slow sort and by evangelical means is precluded by the least approach to exact criticism as well as by a spiritual judgment.

But it is pleaded that the Whitbyite view is strengthened by the frank concession that the thing seen in the vision of Rev. 20:4 was a literal resurrection (pp. 109-111); and

that Rev. 11:3-12, as well as Ezek. 37, etc., help the figurative force (pp. 112-115). I must reject Dr. B.'s historical application of the Two Witnesses as the full adequate sense for the crisis when every word is to be fulfilled. Probably Prof. B. and Dr. E. accept it no more than I do. Then the prodigal son in Luke was dead spiritually, and so made alive. Dr. B. himself admits that this is not the force of our text. So again in Rom. 11, if Israel's casting away be the world's reconciliation, what shall be their reception but life from the dead? Resurrection is the figure, not the explanation as in Rev. 20. Further, Dr. B. admits the reference to Rev. 6:9-11, where undeniably literal death is meant. How then can he escape the inevitable conclusion that here those literally slain are literally raised to life? Surely in all this argument logic and exegesis are equally at fault.

As the Two Witnesses are too questionable to afford a sure test, let us try the Jewish prophecy. Ezekiel was given to see a multitude of dry bones come together, acquiring flesh and sinew and breath, so that they stood on their feet an exceeding great army. This revival is the figure, of which the explanation follows, "These bones are the whole house of Israel," who were to be placed in their own land (Ezek. 37:11-14). John saw thrones with persons seated on them; and then two classes of disembodied souls who had been slain for Christ, or in refusal of the beast, and were now caused to live that they too might reign with Christ. This is the Apocalyptic vision, of which the explanation is, "This is the first resurrection" (Rev. 20:5). Plainly therefore, in all accuracy of exegesis, the cases are in contrast; for in the Jewish prophet resurrection is the vision, in the Christian prophet resurrection is the declared meaning

of the vision. Figures are in no way denied, nor yet symbols. The question is as to the meaning of the vision here, and the revealed answer is, This is the first resurrection.

The context demands the literal sense. Dr. E. confesses it here. Dr. B. resists it in vv. 4-6, while a little lower (vv. 12, 13) he cannot but allow it. Is this spiritual? or reasonable? or consistent? In the same short context two resurrections are predicted, with nothing but blessedness affixed to the first, with nothing but judgment and the lake of fire attached to the second. Yet, according to this shifty invention of Dr. Whitby (as poor a commentator as he was a contemptible critic, to say nothing of his fundamental heterodoxy), the first is to be figurative, the second beyond doubt literal notwithstanding the design and character of this ambiguous and debatable book! Such principles of criticism, such exegetical practice, who can consider but as illegitimate in the extreme? For surely in two visions of the same context, successively balanced against each other with the respective keywords, This is the first resurrection, and, This is the second death, they should be, in all consistency, either both literal or both figurative. As even the allegorist is obliged to admit that the second is literal, we insist that so ought to be the first: else the chapter is not fairly dealt with. No book could be intelligibly interpreted on a plan so arbitrary. It is not the book which is censurable, but its interpreters, of whom the Whitby school is perhaps the lowest.

To obviate the pressure Dr. B. asks for the literal sense of v. 5, “The rest of the dead lived not till the thousand years should be finished.” But, instead of waiting for an answer from a neighbor capable of searching him, he

insinuates a reply which simply proves his own bewilderment: Is it a set of men rising literally from the dead? Why, in the place of this, we find them to be a cloud of mortal men in the flesh, enemies of Christ and His cause, etc. (p. 115). Now the true answer is, that the prophet saw that the rest of the dead did live, and that the most incredulous of believers admit that so it is, in vv. 12, 13. The insurrection of vv. 7-10 is never called a resurrection. In vain is it objected that there was “a little time” more in the account. For the “till” in no way negatives an added space after the thousand years; it denies the rising of the rest of the dead before that. The attempt to substitute the insurrection of Gog and Magog for the resurrection which the prophet only saw afterwards (the sole possible reference that is not fraudulent), is a too evident diversion to prop up the tottering mythical interpretation of vv. 4-6. This may be truly designated as “distortion “ wholesale (p. 116); whereas not a word is distorted in either vision, when both are interpreted literally. The one is a resurrection of life, as the other is of judgment; and thus the Revelation perfectly harmonizes with the Gospel of John. If we believe the Lord in both, a “catholic” or simultaneous resurrection is a mere figment, which scripture discountenances and dispels.

Dr. B. does not put forward here, but he does strongly maintain, in a useful book devoted to it, the restoration of the Jews, once more and for ever blessed nationally in the Holy Land. His error is in assuming that it will be under the gospel, instead of for the kingdom in the new age. For it is a matter of apostolic doctrine, with which the O.T. of course agrees, that “as touching the gospel they (the Jews) are enemies for our (Gentiles’) sake; but

as touching the election they are beloved for the fathers' sake" (Rom. 11:28). They stumbled at the Stumbling-stone — a humbled, rejected, suffering, and crucified Messiah. Therefore are they scorning the gospel, themselves rejected. During their eclipse Gentiles are called by the gospel, and the believers (Jew or Gentile) are united to Christ the heavenly Head by the Holy Spirit sent down. When this new dealing of God is complete (wherein Jewish and Gentile distinctions vanish, and Christ is all), and we go to meet Christ in the air, divine mercy begins afresh to work in Israel, fitting them to be His earthly people, the leader of the nations under the Lord's reign. Thus are God's gifts and calling shown to be unrepented of. Now blindness in part has befallen Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in (Rom. 11). By-and-by all Israel shall be saved, but this only when there shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, Who shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob (Rom. 11:26). It is the kingdom, not the gospel as now.

It is deeply interesting to compare in Rom. 3 the quotations of Ps. 53, and of Isa. 59, not only with the connection in these chapters, but with the citation of Isa. 59 in Rom. 11. Nor does it bear slightly on the question before us. It proves a total change between God's ways under the gospel as now, and under Messiah at His coming again.

In Rom. 3 the apostle quotes the psalm and the prophet to prove the Jew shut up under sin, no less than the Gentile about whom the Jew at least, had no doubt. But, says the apostle, the law, of which you boast as yours only, speaks of you Jews, and condemns you explicitly and utterly; so those two witnesses (which might have been multiplied) conclusively declare it, "that every

mouth may be stopped and all the world be under God's judgment." What follows meanwhile? The gospel of God's grace, whilst Christ is away, glorified in heaven, consequent on His death on the cross. This accordingly is pursued, instead of the conclusion of the psalm, or of the prophecy; which say not a word about the grace which now flows out without respect of persons to Jew and Gentle. They point only to the future when the salvation of Israel is to come out of Zion, God bringing back the captivity of His people, and the Redeemer Himself coming to Zion. The apostle in Rom. 3 says nothing of Israel's hope, because this is not the gospel; it dwells only on the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, Whom God set forth a propitiatory or mercy-seat through faith in His blood.

But in Rom. 11 he is proving that the present rejection of the Jew, which makes room for the indiscriminate grace of the gospel, is not to last always. For the Gentile, if he continue not in God's goodness, will surely be cut off; as the ancient people, if they continue not in their unbelief, will as surely be grafted in. And this he proceeds to show as a prediction from the same Isa. 59. All Israel (not (merely individual) Jews only) shall be saved. But it is, on the one hand, when the fullness of the Gentiles is come in; and on the other, when there shall come out of Zion the Deliverer: two facts most momentous, which indicate the present age at an end, and the new one come. It will be the kingdom when Israel are to be saved; as it is the gospel which gathers out the Gentiles in a mercy which ignores the national and peculiar privileges of Israel. God's covenant to take away Israel's sins only takes effect when Christ comes to and out of Zion.

Dr. B.’s contention is really with St. Paul. Is not this an immense change in God’s methods? A heavenly people cannot consist with an earthly one, both owned here below at the same time. The national restoration of Israel is incompatible concurrently with the indiscriminate grace of the gospel which blots out all natural differences in those who compose Christ’s body for heaven. The coming of Christ closes the heavenly purpose, and introduces in due time the earthly plans of God, Christ being the centre of both. The Father’s name is developed in the former, as in the latter the name of Jehovah, the Almighty God; the Most High, the possessor of heaven and earth. These blessed counsels and ways of God in Christ for His glory are blurred or effaced by the post-millennial scheme.

Of the appeal to missionary feeling in pp. 116-120, and the closing words, little more is needed, as it has been sufficiently met already. It is sweet to find in a single verse of Rev. 22 the adequate safeguard. “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take life’s water freely.” Here we have the heavenly hope, absolutely apart from, and thus unfettered by, the visions of coming judgments, providential or personal. St. John at the close is as fresh in living hope, as St. Paul at the beginning: they at least were God-informed followers of Christ, if the Thessalonians were alarmed by the false cry that the day of the Lord — in some figurative sense probably — was come. There is no mistake in any part of scripture. The Lord bade His servants stand, as it were, behind the door, that when He came and knocked, they might open to Him immediately. Watching for Him is higher and

nearer His heart than working, though blessed are both; and best of all, when watching for Christ imprints ever a heavenly character on serving Him.

It was no question of less or better informed followers. The church was to say, Come (Rev. 22); aye, and not the church only (for even she might, and did, err), but “the Spirit and the bride say, Come.” It was the body of Christ, warranted, guided, and sustained, at the last point to which revelation leads us. The enemy would strive to divert them from the constant waiting for Christ’s presence; be might seek to shake by dread of the day, or by the great tribulation; or he might seek to interpose the improvement of the world or a millennium of Christ’s cause. But no! “The Spirit and the bride say, Come.” And so was the individual to say who had only heard Christ’s voice, ill-informed perhaps about prophecy, the church, or aught else. Still this is the individual hope too: “He that heareth, let him say, Come.”

Then do we find the other side. Our first and best affections are, and ought to be, for Christ our hope. But Christ gives us while waiting for Him to share divine love toward perishing souls; and therefore we can turn round to a lost world and take up the good news, “He that is athirst let him come”: yea, more, “He that will, let him take life’s water freely.” This is the gospel in all its free grace, and in its due place; but it is subordinate to Christ and the hope of Christ, if indeed we are subject to God’s word.

The Coming and the Day of the Lord. - 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8

(Lecture 1 of ‘Our Hope’ and ‘The Prospects of the World.’)

There are various points of view in which it has pleased the Spirit of God to present the coming or presence of the Lord Jesus, and this partly because truth requires it (for there are different aspects of that coming); partly because the Spirit of God must apply the truth morally — that is, according to the need of those addressed, and as the occasion of unfolding the glory of God. Now as this is true of the Bible in general, and of every other part of the truth, so it applies equally to the great theme that I have before me this afternoon.

First of all, we may read in the word of God of the coming of the Lord Jesus as a broad general expectation. I speak of His presence now, or of His return. We have it thus presented in various parts of the New Testament. So it was preached by the apostles; so it was looked for by those who believed. The Thessalonians themselves are an example of this application of the truth. They, on their conversion, did not merely confide in God through the knowledge of the gospel, but they “waited,” as it is written, “for his Son from heaven,” even for their deliverer from the wrath to come. This clearly is the most comprehensive aspect of the coming or presence of the Lord Jesus. It defines nothing that He was to do. Whether He was to make this earth His dwelling-place, and bless here below those who believe in Him, or whether He was to take them away from the earth to heaven, was not therein explained. There was the

certain and, in itself, most influential fact, that the great object of faith is similarly the object of hope; that we have not merely a scene of blessedness to expect by and by, but the return of the same Person who “died for our sins according to the scriptures,” and who was raised again from the dead according to the scriptures — the one to put away our evil, the other to bring in the full exhibition of the blessedness that is the portion of faith, showing it above all in His own glorious person. They looked for Him to come back again, and establish us who wait for Him in the same blessedness in which He stands Himself risen from the dead. Such is the distinct expectation presented in the word of God. It is the counsel of God. It is worthy of His Son, and of the atonement wrought by His Son. Impossible to say more! Other passages may expand, and we may apply, the blessed truth; but to rise higher than that which was worthy of God and His own Son in the deepest work of His love is impossible.

Now the Thessalonians were led by the Spirit of God into this hope from their conversion. Clearly, therefore, it is not some recondite truth that a Christian can afford to do without, nor is it a matter of slow growth, or that needs deep research. I grant you that, being a divine truth, no state or time will ever exhaust it. This is true of all revelation. The word savours of the God who has given it. Hence it is open to. the simplest, and it rises above the deepest; and indeed there is nothing that more characterizes divinely revealed truth than this twofold aspect of it. It is the same in the highest degree with the persons of the Godhead; it is no less true of the incarnation, and of redemption. So it is with the hope.

Thus the Thessalonians are a beautiful sample of comparatively young believers who were led into the truth by divine teaching: not at all so as not to require more truth, but at the same time really taught of God, making it their own, and using it as all truth is meant to be used — practically; used for themselves in their relations with God — for themselves in their relations one with another, and, indeed, as to all men — the absorbing object of hope for the affections when the soul has been truly brought to God.

Indeed, this reminds me to say a word, my friends, to you who are here — I have no doubt very many children of God; but, it may be, not a few that have their doubts. To you, then, I would say with all love, to all who want this assurance, that not to have such a conviction is to lose after all an immense part of the blessing; and, therefore, if you do not know yourselves to be children of God, if you have not peace by faith in Christ Jesus, as far as your enjoyment is concerned, you may be even more miserably off than before your conversion. You cannot now enjoy the world as before; nor can you enter with your old natural zest into pleasures as you are. Nay, what ought you to enjoy? How can it be with the sad consciousness of a want so grave? How take your ease where God’s word so solemnly admonishes of the danger of slighting your real need? And the more thoroughly painful to those who do know the truth, because the blessing is so real, and so near to every one of them; and therefore I do most strongly exhort any who have not this known rest for their souls to look to God now, that they may find it in the Lord Jesus; nay, if it be His will, even by a few words of His grace, that you may taste it now. For let me tell you in the Lord’s name, that He has

done and suffered what justifies God in blessing you, not merely according to your thoughts, but according to His own. And God's blessing in the gospel is to bring you completely out of your own condition, as a ground on which to stand before God, and to plant you in another, even Christ. Your condition is that of the first man, Adam; the man that fell having left God and abandoned the place of blessing in which he was put. But the Second man is come, and He it is who has triumphed; and the Holy Ghost is sent down from heaven now, not merely to dwell in the church, or to work in the way of spiritual gift, but to call out souls according to the riches of the grace of God, through the name of Jesus; and, therefore, the whole point of faith is this, that you call on the name of the Lord, abandoning all that you are, and confessing what you have done. This is repentance and the call of faith Repentance is when a soul pronounces judgment upon itself, according to the truth and character of God. It is a soul turning to God in the name of the Lord Jesus, and not merely receiving by faith the blessing which God can afford now to give to the very full through His Son, but also, and in consequence of' this distrusting nature, judging self, assured that what we are is altogether unfit for the presence of God.

Now the whole practical life of a Christian is the working out of these two things. On the one hand there is the judgment of self day by day, and, consequently, readiness to confess our failures, more particularly anything that is positively against the Lord, and, of course, against man too; but there is on the other the hearty acknowledgment of the Lord Jesus by faith, with the blessing into which He brings. The whole course,

therefore, of Christian experience is just the power of the Holy Ghost bringing the truth and grace of Christ to comfort us and to judge self — the life of the Second to set aside the first man. Bad teaching may have obscured all this; but, certainly, if you have indeed received the Lord Jesus, believing in His name, this is your portion, however feebly you may know it; and this is what you ought to be living in and not merely be learning, though surely to learn if you have ill known it. But if you rest on Him, then comes the blessed hope, — the same Jesus who came into this world, and in His death and resurrection displayed what God is toward me and you, after having displayed what man ought to be toward God in all His life — the same Jesus who died on the cross to put away the body of sin, and to show in His resurrection an altogether new estate for believing man before God — the same Jesus is coming back again.

But then what is He going to do? Here it is that the presence of the Lord Jesus branches out into at; least two great parts. He is coming. But it is evident that the broad teaching of the Bible (taking in now the Old Testament as well as the New — and we ought to take in both), the general truth of the coming of the Lord Jesus is this: He is going to establish that blessed time for which saints and prophets ever waited, since man fell into sin. God has not absolutely consigned this world to His enemy; He does not mean to allow Satan even an appearance of triumph long. I admit to you that, all through, Satan has seemed to gain nothing but victory; but he never does really. He may ruin himself, and has done so; he may ruin others, too, but God will manifestly triumph; as He has already done in perfection to the eye of faith through and in His Son. Jesus has won the

victory, and this by suffering and blood and death. Consequently He has made it not merely to be a question of God's mercy saving souls, though of course this remains true; but, besides, it is made the highest righteousness on God's part to save souls. It is no strain of the divine prerogative, but what God owes the Lord Jesus. The Son of God spent Himself for God the Father, who, now and for evermore, will repay this wondrous debt, which, singularly blessed to say, He owes to Him who is the Son of His love, but also the Son of Man as such. Therein lies the reason why man is destined to such a wonderful place, as it explains also why God passes angels by. It is not but that angels, in their own primary estate and personal qualities, may be superior to man. Assuredly they "excel in strength." Man, of the dust, is at best but a weak creature. But he is destined to reign with Christ, because the Son of God was pleased to become a man, and has accomplished redemption for him.

Therefore the incarnation is of all moment (besides being the very essence and substance of the orthodox faith), and, in order to our having part with Him to God's glory, Christ's death and resurrection. For man being fallen and guilty, Jesus, while the only holy and perfect man, nevertheless must suffer the consequences of all the ruin of man — must know the forsaking and judgment that came upon Him from God in the cross. Accordingly, having now risen above it, He is Himself gone — our life, righteousness, and peace — into the heavenly glory, but waits to come back again. All Christians professedly own this. All the creeds of Christendom acknowledge it — in general terms at least; and so far it is quite right. But then we shall find that

the word of God, as must be the case, is always wiser, richer, and more profound than any forms of truth that ever were or can be drawn up by man — I care not who or what they are. Who will deny that God is incomparably better than man, or His word better than all the dogmas that have been founded upon it, or drawn from it?

The precious word of God I have in my hand shows us then, first, the grand but general expectation that He will come (or return, as we now say) to put down evil, and to establish good. Accordingly He will have a kingdom, not alone in an invisible way by the power of the Holy Ghost, but when He personally and visibly reigns over the earth I do not say living on the earth — this is going beyond scripture — yet none the less taking the earth in a most manifest manner under His direct power and government, and consequently meeting and accomplishing all the yearnings and expectations that were founded on Old Testament scripture; for the New in no way neutralizes the Old, but rather confirms it, while it also brings in “better things,” and the mystery hid from ages and from generations. The Lord will thus, in the most complete manner, accomplish the hope for which His saints and people were waiting from of old. Christianity, whilst it ushers in new and heavenly things after a new sort, seals the truth of the old and earthly things according to prophecy.

But is this all that scripture tells us? By no means. We do find it in the New Testament. Thus, when the apostle Peter preached to the Jews (Acts 3), he told them to “repent and be converted, that their sins might be blotted out.” What had been the consequence? “Times of refreshing should come from the presence of the Lord.”

And how? By a fresh outpouring of the Spirit? No, but by sending Jesus Christ, and so fulfilling the prophecy. It is the more striking, because, if ever there was a blessed season of spiritual power here below, it was then; and then was the time, if it was simply to be a spiritual reign to be brought in by preaching and like means, to have held it out. But what they had then was only a sample of what was coming by and by. Now such is not the expectation that Peter presses, although it is true that the Holy Ghost will be poured out a second time. Then will be the latter rain, as Pentecost the former; but such is not the stated way, nor was it then the moment or suited occasion for re-affirming that truth. What the apostle sets out is, that God will send Jesus Christ, who has been already fore-appointed. But alas! we find the Jews, instead of receiving the truth, immediately after reject this witness of it. When the enmity to the testimony of Jesus of Nazareth, risen and exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour to Israel, drew out Jewish hatred to the full, they displayed it in killing Stephen, another blessed witness of it. Thereon God brings out a remarkable change in His dealings — a turning-point in His ways. For the blessing, instead of now being found in Jerusalem, or presented to it only, flows away from it in strong tide. The church was scattered everywhere, and its members carried with them the seeds of eternal life. The apostle of the Gentiles in due course was called. Philip meanwhile is used in Samaria, in a way altogether unprecedented outside the favoured people, though God would not give the full distinctive blessing of the Holy Ghost in an independent way. The apostles Peter and John are sent down in order to link up the work, and make it practically one. There is no countenance given to human independency in the things of God.

We find, thenceforward, that the current of the blessing sets in towards the Gentiles — to the way that is desert, to the Ethiopian stranger, to Azotus. Still more conspicuously, the apostle Paul brings out in due time among the Gentiles the distinctive features of Christianity and the church. With this goes a most important difference in the way in which the presence of the Lord is presented. As long as it was a question of Israel, the prominent thought was the Lord Jesus coming, and in divine grace restoring and exalting the very people that crucified Him. And then will all the nations of the earth be blest; for they cannot as a whole know this, till Israel becomes by divine mercy the first of nations. Such is God's order.

Thus the rejection of the truth and of the grace of God by the Jews led to the call of the apostle of the Gentiles, and to that remarkable development of the truth of God, which we now know in what is commonly called Christianity. And this, as remarked, gives a very important modification to the truth we are now considering. For what is the essential outward peculiarity of Christianity as such? Is it not a Saviour absent on high, rather than a king governing His own people Israel, and others — the Gentiles — blest under His benignant sway? It is not the power of God putting down Satan manifestly in the world, and the earth yielding her increase, but the Holy Ghost giving victory over evil by faith, and saints separated from the world. All those expectations belonged to the hopes of Israel, and will be accomplished when Israel re-appears in the scene by and by. Christianity, I repeat, in no wise sets aside such a prospect, but rather seals its truth, however postponed for the present. At the same time it

shows us what is altogether different, namely, the King rejected instead of being received by His people; and the messengers of the King, instead of finding homage when He went up to heaven, themselves likewise rejected. The proffered blessing was thus completely discarded by Israel for the time; and, during their interval of eclipse, the Gentiles became the direct object of God's testimony, and the channel of privilege in what is called Christianity. You see it yourselves. You know what the condition of Israel is, and the extraordinary fact that the people who have the Hebrew scriptures least of all understand their own best boon. They have an older history than any in the earth can really prove, — I do not say can boast of, — for of what will not man boast? and so much the more, because he has no sound foundation for it. But the Jews have a legitimate and most ancient history, and this, too, divinely guaranteed and proved. And, more than this, they have a future — a most sure and glorious future; but their future will be found, where they least look for it, under the shelter of His wings whom they foully scorned and crucified — even of Jehovah Messiah, the God of Israel.

During the time, then, of Israel's refusal of the Anointed One, Jesus is not only rejected by them, but He is exalted in heaven where He takes a new place. Never do you read in scripture, that when born of a woman and under the law He was born Head of the church; never do you hear God saying in His word that when Jesus lived and laboured on earth He was saluted even as priest. Never is it written there that He died Head of the church. Not so; but when He was raised from the dead and exalted to God's right hand, then and there He was given by God Head to the church. The epistle to the

Ephesians furnishes the positive demonstration of this truth, the epistle to the Colossians just the same; and I need hardly say there is no scripture that has even the appearance of contradicting it. All contrary thoughts are mere human speculation, or the rubbish of tradition, or that dry heap of mummies, — scientific theology. With all evidence scripture proves that a new state of things came in with the descent of the Holy Ghost, consequent upon the death and resurrection of Christ, and His heavenly place of exaltation, where He is now in glory. For the Holy Ghost is personally sent down, as I need not insist, in a manner altogether unexampled; and Christianity exhibits, not only the gospel of God's grace, but the unfolding of these two great truths: — first, Christ Head of the church at the right hand of God; and, secondly, the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven baptizing Jews and Gentiles that believe into that one body, the church. Never is there a trace of such a body before; never so much as a promise that any should be united as members to Christ. If one had talked about members of His body, even when He was here below, the thing would have been unintelligible. Nobody contemplated such a relationship. Not only no one thought of it, but God Himself did not reveal it. It was the mystery that was hidden from ages and generations. Now it is revealed.

As this has an immense bearing on all other truth, giving additional force to what had been known before, while it opens out vast tracts wholly unknown, so the hope of the Church is affected in the most intimate manner by so great a change, — Christ not received by Israel, and reigning over them and the Gentiles here below, but exalted to the right hand of God in heaven, and there

made Head of a new thing. Hence the apostle Paul brings out, according to the Holy Ghost, the capital truth that, instead of the old people of God waiting for Christ to come and bless them and so all nations (Psalm 67) upon the earth, Christ will receive the Church to Himself above, so that, in the day when He appears and accomplishes the old hopes, He will be glorified in His saints and admired in all that believed, risen from the dead or changed into His own glorious likeness. Thus there will be no incongruous mixture of those risen and changed with men in earthly bodies. There will be the two immense, and at the same time simultaneous, scenes of blessing, — the earth with Jews and nations blessed under His reign, and the heavenly places filled with those that are then in a condition suited to heaven; for "as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." But that same Jesus who is the Head of heavenly glory will reign over all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues; and therefore Israel, who were promised the first earthly place, will have it in the mercy and faithfulness of God, — a people truly converted and prepared to receive the Lord "in that day."

It is plain that all would be confusion if these two purposes of God were both in operation at the same time. Supposing, for instance, a Jew converted now, if God were forming both an earthly and a heavenly people together, might he not say with reason, "These two callings perplex me sorely; I do not know which to choose. On the whole it seems to me that a heavenly place would be better than an earthly. At the same time an earthly place is what all my fathers have been waiting for; and so I am not exactly sure which I ought

to close with.” But in the wise goodness of God there is no such confusion; for now that the earthly calling is vanished, it is a question of heaven or hell. But, more than this, such a direction would introduce the utmost doctrinal ambiguity, because the manner in! which God calls the heavenly people to walk is on a different footing from that of such as are called with an earthly calling. You can understand it from your own households. You do not teach your children to do exactly what you tell your servants to do — at least I hope not. You do not put them under the same regime There is not only a difference of relationship, but a different line of conduct suited to each relationship. And let me lay it down as a weighty truth, which you will find verified in scripture and indeed in morality, that all our duties flow from our relationships. Consequently the first question is to find what is my relationship, because then I have to act accordingly. Precisely in this way it is that the earthly people, having rejected Christ and the blessing, have forfeited all for the time; and so true is this, that the Jews, notwithstanding all their wit and intelligence, — and they are behind no nation in these, and indeed in other great qualities, — yet afford the melancholy spectacle of being of all peoples within Christendom the most ignorant of their own sacred books. There is no Christian so ignorant of the Bible as the Jew; and this is not confined to illiterate Jews of our day or any other. I am not speaking of such alone. Take the best of Abraham’s seed, and you will find the ignorance of scripture most remarkable in the very chief rabbins themselves. There are none more grossly in the dark as to the divine truth than their most celebrated writers. This shows us that blindness has passed upon them, and is a practical comment on the word of the Lord.

But now we poor Gentiles are brought in. There is then an evident change; and I refer to this in support of what I have been already saying, as far as it goes. The apostle Paul brings out with admirable fulness and precision, not only the call of the Gentiles, but the formation of those that belong to Christ into the church of God. It is not simply a people who have the gospel preached to them, or who confess His name and are baptized, but really united to Him as members of His body by the Holy Ghost who is given to this end. These are waiting for the Lord Jesus, but not to govern them on the earth; for this is not their relationship to Christ. They await Him to take them out of the earth to be with Himself in heaven. It is not denied that they will reign with Christ over the earth; but I say that their own proper home — the home of their hearts, and the sphere in which they will have their brightest glory — will be with Christ in heavenly places. Such is the teaching e.g. of Ephesians 1.

But this clears the way at once. Also, let me remark, that it is a very important point practically for all Christians; for there is nothing more common, for instance, than to speak of Christ as if He were the king of the church: even our fine and commonest hymns say so, — as “my Prophet, Priest, and King.” Do I doubt that he was an excellent man who wrote it? I have not a word to say against him, but very much to urge against the thought. We must not consecrate grave errors under the shelter of the best of names: least of all does the time allow it now. It is a moment when everything is shaking, — when a great deal that is good is put in question by the bad, but (I am thankful to God) a great deal that is bad by the good. It is therefore a time when no soul can afford to treat slightly the truth of God. His children will soon

require it all; they will need firm support for their feet. I repeat, then, that the relation of king is true for Israel, but is not true for the Christian or for the church. Christ is the Lord of the Christian — the absolute Lord of all He has bought. Therefore it is not in the smallest degree to weaken subjection to Christ; for, contrariwise, the relationship of a father with his child is a closer one than that of a king with his subject. Again, take the relationship of a husband and wife: what can be so intimate as this ? Such is the relationship of Christ and the church; and, therefore, to take the old notion of Christ being the King of the church is just unwittingly to be Judaized; it is to be drawn aside by a notion. It is that which is perfectly true for an Israelite, and so will be accomplished by and by; for Christ will not in the same way espouse them. In a vague general way Jehovah will be their Husband. It is used in this way in the Old Testament; but in no sense will it be true of them that they are “members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.” He who says so is merely imagining vain things. He has no scripture for it.

The word of God brings in, then, this near and blessed relationship, and along with this a hope suited to it. The hope is, that He who is our Head and our Bridegroom will come for His Bride, and receive those who are so closely united to Himself. Thus when He does come, it is not to reign over them as His people in their place, but to take them as His bride (and you can see, I may assume, that it is suitable, and must be so) to His place. Surely, when we think who Christ is, and what the home of Christ is in the Father’s house, we can understand that more is due to the Son of God, than merely to beautify this poor world, or to banish the elements of

evil out of it. That is all true, and will be for His people on earth; but He has got a home of love He has known before the earth was founded, and into the Father's house He will not be ashamed to bring those He is not ashamed even now to call His brethren.

Accordingly, the Lord Himself presents this very hope in John 14. It is not, therefore, an absolutely new thing; though there is a modification of it in the teaching of Paul. You will find, accordingly, in the two earlier gospels that He presents things in connection with the earth, and consequently with the Jews as well as the nations. Luke 12 brings in heaven morally. But in the gospel of John the Lord leaves out all about Jerusalem and Israel, and presents exclusively this blessed hope to the Christian — that, as surely as He went away to heaven, He is coming again from heaven, and will gather us to be with Himself there.

The apostle Paul brings out this precious hope in the first epistle to the Thessalonians. The occasion for it was this: these Christians were waiting for Christ with such simplicity, that they, in fact, fondly imagined that no Christian was ever to die. They were so filled with Christ's return, that they believed that the Lord might come while they themselves were living. It was quite right to be always waiting — quite wrong to suppose that no one could die. Accordingly the enemy took advantage of death having made an inroad among the Thessalonians; and inasmuch as they were totally unprepared for it, they were quite cast down. Instead of having peaceful confidence in the Lord's love, they sorrowed overmuch, fearing that those who died would miss some blessing when the Lord Jesus returned. We are not to suppose that they fancied that such would be

lost; but they did conceive that not to be upon earth waiting for Christ at His return would involve those who died in a great and irreparable loss. Not so, says the Spirit of God by the apostle. The Lord Jesus Christ, when He returns, will first of all raise those that are sleeping. “The dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” That is, there will be a barely appreciable interval between the dead saints raised and the living saints caught up. Both shall be translated to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall be for ever with Him. Now, clearly this put an end to the notion that the saints who meanwhile fall asleep were to suffer particularly through their death.

But more than that. The apostle continues, and shows that when the Lord Jesus appears in glory, He will bring along with Him those saints that have slept by Him — not their spirits only, but themselves (body, soul, and spirit) glorified, of course. The way in which the dead saints, as well as those that may be till then alive, can thus come with Him is this: He is coming in person, first of all, to change them into His likeness. Whether asleep in death or still alive, they will be caught up to be with the Lord; so that when He comes in judgment of the habitable world (i.e. in His day) they will accompany Him in glory. In this we find the two great parts of the presence of the Lord Jesus. That is to say, He will first come for the saints, and in the second place He will come with them. Both are called “the coming, or presence, of the Lord.” They are the two main aspects — if one may so say — of Christ’s coming: the first, to gather the heavenly saints to Himself; the second, to

bring them with Him when He appears in glory. It is the second part of the coming of Christ that connects itself with Old Testament hopes (as, for instance, with Zech. 14: “The Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee”). Clearly, therefore, as we now know, they must have been raised and taken up to be with Christ above; and, as we also know for certain, we who are alive on the earth waiting for Jesus cannot be changed and caught up with the raised ones, to be with the Lord above, unless He Himself have come to this end.

Therefore His coming must be in the first place for the saints — raising the dead, changing the living; and then there is, further, His coming with them all. But this does not determine the length of interval between the two. One cannot see in 1 Thess. 4 and 5 any sufficient reason why all this might not be practically at the same hour, as far as that scripture is concerned. We are dependent, therefore, upon other testimony. Let no soul receive anything without divine warrant for it. I beseech all my brethren and sisters that are here to beware of haste on a subject so important: God will surely give sufficient light, even for the simplest. Never be hurried into a conviction; never give up what you have — if, indeed, you have received it as the truth of God — until positive ground of scripture be shown to the contrary. On the other hand, holding fast whatever you know to be the truth, always have a mind open to receive more.

Again, the Second Epistle was written not to give the Thessalonians comfort about the dead saints, disabusing their minds of their needless sorrow, but to dispel a delusion brought in by false teachers about the living — themselves included. The first does not seem to have been a question of wrong teaching, but of their own

erroneous notions — a hasty inference from what was most true and right. But in the second case the enemy was at work. The truth that had been blessed to their souls was being undermined by the confusion and false assertions of unscrupulous Judaizing teachers. Such were ordinarily the persons who ruined the church. Satan had used these Judaizers to shake and alarm their souls by confounding the coming of the Lord with His day. From these they seemed to have imbibed the apprehension, as they were at that time suffering grievous persecution (which had already caused anxiety to the apostle's mind about them — 1 Thess. 3), that these persecutions might be the predicted tribulation, and that this tribulation was, in some sense, "the day of the Lord." Thus everything was jumbled together in their thoughts. There were three errors joined in one. That is to say, they confounded the presence of the Lord with His day, and His day with the tribulation, and their actual troubles with that future tribulation. It is evident that all was a sea of confusion in their souls.

First of all then, the Spirit of God explains to them the moral character of that day. In the first chapter of our epistle He shows them that the Lord will certainly appear with angels of His might in flaming fire; but that the day of the Lord is to deal judicially with the enemies, and in no wise to let persecution fall on His own saints. It is now that the faithful are called to suffer persecution as a privilege, and be prepared for it, as he had previously intimated in his former letter; but the day of the Lord will be precisely the time when there will be no persecution more for the people of God. For, in fact, that day will display two facts — the saints of God in perfect rest and joy and blessedness with Christ; and their

enemies under retributive dealings from God, who will lay His hand heavily upon them, bringing in death and destruction. No doubt a graduated scale will not be wanting, suitable to different measures of guilt; for God in judgment does not fail to take into consideration all circumstances. Even in His judgment of the living this will be in measure true; absolutely so in the judgment of the dead at the end of all.

This, then, clearly set aside a good deal that the false teachers had sought to infuse; but, in the second chapter, the portion I have read deals with the error in a very direct and full manner, besides giving us, as God's explanations always do, positive truth independently of the error that is dispelled.

First, the apostle beseeches his brethren "by the coming of the Lord Jesus." Here it is my conviction that our common authorized version is perfectly correct. I am aware that there are not a few scholars who will have it that it means "concerning," or "in regard to the coming." There is not the slightest doubt that the word (ὑπὲρ) will bear this; but there is no necessity for it everywhere — here rather the contrary. For there is an element in the matter, which those who so reason do not appear to have taken properly into consideration. It is manifest that you cannot decide on the construction of a phrase by looking at a single word;.you must look at its bearings, and weigh all that is connected with it. Now in this case the apostle beseeches them. He is beseeching by. Now, it is a regular usage, in the language that the Holy Ghost employed in the New Testament, to apply this very word in the sense "by," or "on account of," where it goes with a phrase of entreaty. No doubt, if there were not a connection of prayer or beseeching, the

preposition would quite well bear the meaning of “in respect to,” or “in behalf of.” Such a meaning is as common as it is legitimate; but not so with a verb of entreaty. The English version is therefore, in my judgment, perfectly justified, while the proposed change is otherwise inadmissible. “We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him.” Mark the forcibly expressed connection. The gathering together of the saints from the earth, which clearly takes in both the living and the dead (these raised, those changed) is dependent on the presence of the Lord Jesus. They are associated facts in the mind of the Spirit, who thereby entreats the brethren, by the apostle, “that ye be not soon shaken in mind or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as by us, as that the day of the Lord is present.” Here one is obliged to differ from the authorized version. For this I am sorry; but at the same time it is inevitable for the truth’s sake.

* Not only is there no need to insert “by” in italics, but it seems to me an injury to the forge of one article for the two clauses. “Our gathering together unto Him” is intended to be set forth as consequent on the “presence of our Lord Jesus Christ,” both forming one combined idea.

There are two points erroneously given: one in the common Greek text, the other in the common English Bible. “The day of Christ” is not the right reading in this place. All scholars, let them be who they may, Romanists, Lutherans, Calvinists, high, broad, or low church, in short, every competent person, no matter where he may be, acknowledges the truth of what has just been affirmed, which I state thus strongly that no

one present may imagine that I insist on any word as a better reading, for which there is not the most satisfactory evidence. It is “the day of the Lord” in the best MSS., etc. Now the “day of the Lord,” although closely connected with the “day of Christ,” is not absolutely the same. Not that I propose to discuss such nice distinctions now, because this would involve details: I confine myself to notorious fact. “The day of the Lord” means the time when the Lord will deal judicially with this world, with nations, with living men, with the earth. The Thessalonians were misled into the strange idea — strange at least to our minds — of confounding the trouble they were then enduring with “that day.” Of course, those who taught them so must have held a kind of spiritual day of the Lord; that is, they could not have meant that the Lord was personally to appear in order to bring in that day, but that the then time of great and sore trouble for the people of God might be justly called “the day of the Lord.” This partial preparatory application of the phrase is common in the Old Testament, but it is not so used in the New Testament, which only employs it in its full and final sense.

Carefully observe, however, that what they taught was not that it was “at hand,” or soon coming, but that it was really come. Such is the unequivocal meaning of the word (ἐνέστηκε). It occurs in the same form in about half a dozen places of the New Testament. I think it may be proved to a plain English reader that what I am stating now is certainly correct. Thus, in Romans 8:38, “things present” (ἐνεστῶτα) is the same word. What makes it more striking is that “things to come” (μέλλοντα) is used also, and another word. Now if the former meant “things at hand,” there could be no

contrast; but this there is very decidedly between “things present” and “things to come.” In short, who could set over against each other “things at hand” and “things to come,” if the former word signified pretty much the same thing as the latter? In 1 Corinthians 3:22, the same contrast occurs. In 1 Corinthians 7:26, “for the present1 necessity” is the same word: a necessity “at hand” is not the sense, but one already existing So again with Hebrews 9:9, we have the same word, meaning the time then present, and certainly not a future season. In Gal. 1:4 we read of “this present evil world” or age. The world to come will not be evil but blessed. The present age, and the present age only, is evil. It is abundantly plain that in these cases the word not only means “actually there,” but it can mean nothing else. The meaning “at hand,” or just coming, would destroy the sense in all these occurrences of the word. I do not recollect any other in the New Testament. I have named five instances, and this in 2 Thess. 2:2 makes six.

Another form of the verb appears in 2 Timothy 3:1, where it is said that in the last days perilous times shall come. But even here, though future, not perfect, it does not mean “shall be at hand,” but actually there. The reason why I do not dwell on this last is that the tense is not the same. The same force is found, as far as I know, in every occurrence of the word in other books, as the Apocrypha and the profane authors. I have gone into the matter the more because it used to be alleged, and may be still repeated, that in three or four cases in classic Greek the word has the sense of “at hand.” But I have examined those instances carefully, and am prepared to show that there the word does not require, and I think will not even bear, the meaning “at hand” any more than

in the New Testament. But it ought to be clear that the word of God does not demand such search into a few stray passages in Greek orators or comedians, even if doubtful, for the purpose of deciding its own meaning. The uniform sense in every other place of scripture ought to prevail, and must, I think, in an unbiassed judgment. Thus, then, as there cannot be a doubt that the true text is “the day of the Lord,” so “is present” is the true translation of the last word.

But observe the importance of this. The apostle entreats them by the presence of the Lord, which was full of blessedness, as it was their gathering to be with Him and bound up with it, not to be alarmed about the day of the Lord as if it could be now come, as was pretended by some. Such is the genuine meaning and drift of his appeal to their hearts. You, who know that you are going to be caught up to the Lord Jesus at His presence, do not you be harassed by the false cry that the day of the Lord is come. It is all a mistake. The day of the Lord is not present yet. And as this is a motive drawn from their own hope and knowledge of His love against receiving that egregious error, so he strengthens it by a reason drawn from the state of the world and of the Christian testimony. They ought not to expect that day till there come the falling away. Such is the strict force — the apostasy; “a falling away” is feeble. “The apostasy” is the word. By this he means the public abandonment of Christian truth in the earth, and no doubt of more than Christian truth, but this peculiarly. Yet I doubt not that at the same time, when Christendom will abandon the Christian faith, the Jews also will fall into the dreadful snares predicted for the last days.

I admit that to men at large all this is unpalatable. Those who indulge in hopeful visions of the progress of society do not like to hear of the apostasy, unless it can be fastened on some dark corner of Europe apart from themselves, where this only or the like can be treated as the apostasy. They care not to weigh seriously the warning of God which limits it to no quarter of Christendom, whatever locality may be its central seat. But be not deceived. Do not heed those fair promises of men. My friends, as surely as God has written here of that which is before Christendom, the apostasy is coming, and rapidly. What means the fact that in our own day we see such an unexampled increase of atheistic teaching, and this not among the openly profane but in church and chapel-goers? Why, you can hardly take up a modern history, say of Greece, but you are flooded with infidelity. If you dip into a modern book of geology, incredulity fills its pages — the denial of active divine intervention. The anatomy of man is tainted with the poison, which infects also the natural history of beasts. These men industriously use every opportunity for spreading their denial, I might even say, of common conscience about God. Everything now is taking the form of rationalism or positivism, at any rate amongst those who pretend to be the party of progress. It is the same with metaphysics and ethics, as with the men of material science. And the most distressing symptom is not that you have a crack-brained philosopher in France teaching his fellows to look, at and worship God in a mother, a wife, and a child, but sensible and clever men in this practical age accepting his atheism. One can understand his formal worship of humanity, and his wretched trinity of man; but at the same time, while one can see the madman in every word and thought of the

kind, the gravest sign to me is, that in a sober practical country like England, and among men of disciplined minds, who can scarcely ignore the Bible and might at the least have profited by the wicked folly of M. Comte to steer clear of it, this is, I believe, the popular philosophy of young England Such is the tendency at the universities of the favourite books even on logic and political economy. Those who used to be famous for their sound Anglicanism and old-fashioned conservatism are now publishers of this self-sufficient demoralizing trash. Hence, works of this sort, with poetry to match, are found on the tables of almost all educated England, — particularly, I am sorry to say, among the higher classes, though the poison trickles down to the bottom of the garment, through all the artisan classes of this and other countries.

No wonder the leaders of infidelity clap their hands at their successes high and low; they at least know very well what must be the result of the indifference and infatuation of those who might be expected to stand in the gap. They know well that youths cannot have atheism insinuated in text-books on logic, etc., without reaping by-and-by a whirlwind from that which is sown there. They know well that in every quarter men are drinking from sources different from and opposed to revelation, and they do not exaggerate the results. Nor is it confined to collegians or speculative men; it ramifies gradually all classes, and especially the shrewd hard-reasoning sons of toil in the north. Nay, it is found increasingly amongst those whose profession it is to preach the truth. I do not mean that these are open infidels: perhaps it might be safer for others and more honest in themselves if they were. I do not mean to say

that they are prepared to go all lengths with their guides; but there can be no doubt that a great deal of value, admiration, and study is bestowed on the chief perverters of the public mind as “thinkers” by a growing mass of Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist divines. It has long been so with Romanists. No doubt there is very much more that Satan aims at bringing in; but the issue of what is even now at work will be what is here called “the apostasy.”

Nor will this be all; there is another step — that the man of sin will be revealed. For just as God had a man of righteousness in the Lord Jesus Christ, so Satan will have a man of sin. Thus there is, first, the systematic abandonment, not perhaps of Christian forms, but of revealed and professed Christian truth: then will arrive a personal expression of man’s will without God who puts himself at the head of it. There will not be wanting a man to lead the evil when the right moment comes. This is the true meaning and place of the man of sin; the Holy Spirit furnishes here a picture of him spiritually considered. If you want to see him politically, you must look at Daniel 11:36, where the king that does according to his own will is the self-same personage here described religiously, if one may so speak of Antichrist. Daniel naturally treats the king in connection with the Jews, with the land of Palestine, which is clearly to be his habitat, and with the kings of the north and of the south and their conflicts. The apostle looks at the same person in connection with corrupted Christendom giving up the truth; and accordingly his description is of this sort: he “opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God

sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

I am aware that many of the old divines, some of them excellent men withal, used to apply all this to the Pope. I have not the slightest sympathy with the Pope, or anything in principle or practice that belongs to his system; at the same time I dare not be so false to the word of God as to allow such exaggerations. Not so: even the apostasy will be a more thorough and deadly departure from revelation, and will engulph Protestants and Papists alike. Does Popery, bad as it is, so deny fundamental truth, that a man who is trained in or even perverted into it cannot be saved? This I do not believe. Popery denies neither the Trinity nor mediation. I believe Christians have been found within its borders. So far from accepting the notion that the Pope is the antichrist, I believe that there have been Christian men in all grades of its priesthood, secular and regular, probably, among the Popes. At the same time I acknowledge that of all circles whence a soul can be saved, there is none to my own mind so horribly offensive to the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ. That a man may there be converted and live and die is to me simply a proof of the immense mercy of God, not at all of anything good in the Popish system. But while thus stating candidly and explicitly my firm belief as to this, I say again that in 2 Thess. 2 looms a future system of yet more fatal evil. Finally a man takes the place of God, and is worshipped as such (not as the servant of His servants, or the vicar of Christ).

Thus the first overture of Satan is his last triumph apparently. "Apparently," I say; for it is never anything more on Satan's part; it is the last seeming triumph of

the enemy before the Lord comes in judgment. What man was tempted by in the garden of Eden was to become as God, knowing good and evil. What Satan seems to gain in this worst development of the latter day will be the more openly taking and allowed the place of God; and so much the more because the law had run its course, and ought to have been respected; the gospel will have run its course, and ought to have been glorified. But if souls are not won by the grace of God, the worse they become by His testimonies rejected or depraved. The more you hear the truth and are in the midst of its profession, so much the more you show your own impenitent heart, if you do not bow to the God who surrounds you with such a blessing. Therefore the apostasy and the man of sin are not after Judaism only but Christianity, according to the analogy of His past dealings and the ways of men, no less than the plain word of God which unveils the end of this age.

This last is the ground which I take as decisive. It is according to His solemn declarations, that when His fullest testimony is definitively abandoned, there will follow the most awful time of evil and judgment of the earth. The unbelief and ingratitude of the world for the blessings of Christianity will have for its result God sending them strong delusion. Did they not bide with the truth, and despise His grace? Did they not go back to tradition, and philosophy, and, in principle to heathenism — in fine, on to the apostasy and the man of sin? Perhaps this may sound to some strange and strong. But the word of God is wiser than men. And, after all, why should you wonder? At the present time University folk, and many more men of intellect, are going wild about Plato and Aristotle, or their modern successors.

What were those of old? Idolaters, indeed, but also Pantheists or Atheists. Tutors or parents may plead that it is only their philosophy that is sought after. Depend upon it, the connection between these things is far more intimate than people imagine.

Again, observe the revived tendency to the love of religious show in building, music, and ritual, with the most egregious pretensions on the part of the hierophants. I need not tell you that there is a vast deal of all this in London, and that a powerful impetus has been given to it quite lately. I do not speak of Popery, because at least some Protestants shame the Papists, going far beyond them in the absurdity of their doings in green and gold, in posture and imposture. But what I affirm is, that all these are indications of what is coming. Little premonitions they may be, in some eyes, but of unparalleled evil I assuredly count them. Even if positivism, for instance, were restricted for the present to those who are accepted as thinkers, be assured the hour is not distant — in the present immediate circulation of thought — when their blasphemous materialism will percolate by degrees through the lower strata of society. When this arrives, the final plans of Satan will follow rapidly — a dreadful day for Christendom, and not for England only. Yet what country has been such a breakwater against error as the favoured land in which we live? The upshot will be not superstition, nor idolatry alone, but the antichrist. How bitterly will the despisers of prophecy be disappointed! The devil, after all, is wiser than they, for he is using the most opposite parties to bring about that which none of them suspect — the apostasy and the man of sin.

In order that this should come, the restraint must have been removed. Hence the apostle refers them to this: "When I was yet with you, I told you these things; and now ye know what withholdeth." The predicted issue has been postponed and hindered by a mighty obstacle. It might have been, I suppose, soon after Christ went to heaven; for there was no lack of Judaism and Gentile philosophy, not to speak of evil and unbelief, in the world then. Why was it that their evil did not carry the day against Christians then? Because the power of the Holy Ghost hindered it. The Holy Ghost came down from heaven, and idolatry became at last ashamed to show its face, slinking behind imperial power and philosophic special pleading, but at length into holes and corners among the rude and gross, till the empire formally gave it up. It was thus overthrown in its high places; and the consequence is that Christianity has nominally prevailed in all the more civilized countries of the earth from that time to this. When the result which I have alluded to comes to pass, God will pour a spirit of judicial blindness over Christendom, just as He did on Israel, and of old on Egypt. A heart waxed fat characterized the Jew at the first coming of Christ. This will be yet more awfully renewed in Christendom before His second coming, and this simultaneously with the removal of the great restraint that God opposes to the uprising of the long working mystery of lawlessness. It will then manifestly reign without a check in the world. This is what the apostle mentions here, and in very remarkable terms "Now ye know," says he, "what withholdeth." Purposely, it appears to me, the Spirit of God did not explain; not through fear of the emperor certainly (whom it could in no serious way disturb), but with perfect wisdom, because the withholding power might not bear exactly

the same form at one time as another. The ancient fathers in general conceived that the great let or hindrance alluded to was the Roman empire. Hence the early Christians used to pray for the empire with especial earnestness, because they believed that as long as it lasted, there could not be the apostasy, or the man of sin (i.e., antichrist). I believe they were substantially right, although, like many others, their view was narrow and incomplete.

When the Roman empire fell, I dare not insinuate that the apostasy came; nor do I believe, for the reasons already given, that it can be intelligently sustained that the antichrist rose up Yet the Pope no doubt did gradually claim ecumenical rights as a bishop in a wholly unscriptural and grossly ambitious manner. Only I deny that this is what the antichrist means. The Roman empire was, we know, broken up, and this gave occasion for the vaulting ambition of the Papacy with abominable idolatry and the cruellest persecution. But we are approaching times of radical change and farspread convulsion in the earth. Of this no thoughtful man has the slightest doubt; but it will not yet be the removal of the hindrance. This will remain, both while the church is here and as long as there is government sanctioned by God; for this last also I believe to be kept up by the Spirit. It is not true that the Holy Ghost only works in the salvation of souls, or in the; church. There is a controlling power exercised by the Spirit of God. There is a providential maintenance of government in the world. As long as this lasts, the apostasy cannot be — certainly not the revelation of the man of sin. The person may be there, but he cannot come out in Satan’s unchecked power; but directly God is pleased to let go

all divinely-sanctioned government, as well as the manifestation of His grace in the church, then the coast will be clear for the enemy to do his worst. Satan will immediately embrace his long-coveted opportunity: then will be the manifestation of the man of sin. So it is said here, “The mystery of iniquity [lawlessness] doth already work.” It was working from the days of the apostles. “Only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.”

It is thus evident that there is a person who restrains, as well as a restraining power or system. I am not aware of any other to which this so admirably applies as to the Spirit of God. It must be remembered that the Holy Ghost is both a person and a power. You may speak of the Spirit of God figuratively, referring to His energy, operation, or character of action; or you may speak of Him as a Divine person. Here the apostle speaks of both a restraint and a restrainer: of what else could he adopt both these ways of speech ? The Spirit of God, then, appears to me to be a far larger and truer way of putting the matter — not necessarily Himself acting in the church, but also as controlling in the, world. Take it, then, as including His presence in the church and His power in the world, which acts up to a given epoch as a restraint upon the devil. Then, when the term of fresh striving, or rather of restraining, is exhausted, the church is taken out of the scene, and soon after government falls directly into Satan’s hands. God is pleased to allow a mighty convulsion to take place; and as great political revolutions are apt to end in reaction, and a popular chief to seize the throne, so it will be in that day. The beast is said to emerge out of what is called the sea (Rev. 13); that is to say, an imperial power

rises out of the political confusion. The proofs time will not permit me to state now; but this I cannot doubt to be the prospect before the West in prophecy.

This entirely falls in with the statement of the apostle here. “Then,” says he, “shall that wicked one be revealed.” I quite agree with those who take the word “wicked” as altogether too feeble. It should be “that lawless one.” I grant you that all lawlessness must be wickedness; but all wickedness does not exactly take the shape of lawlessness. An unfaithful person might act ill in his ways, but still own a real authority above him. Lawlessness supposes not only evil but the entire rejection of all superior authority. It is the worst public form of wickedness, especially in those who used and were bound to own law. “Then shall that lawless one be revealed.” We saw “the mystery of lawlessness” before. There is a link between the two, and a contrast: the lawlessness that wrought secretly is headed up in the openly lawless one, directly the letting power ceases, the letter being gone. “And then shall that lawless one be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall reveal with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with” — what? His presence? Certainly. Yet this is not what is said, but “the brightness” — or the manifestation — “of His presence.” Why say the shining forth of it, if His presence is necessarily seen by every eye? Where would be the accuracy of saying the manifestation of His presence, if it were, in its own nature and character, a manifest thing?

This points to what is so very important in the first verse of this chapter, where we have the presence or coming of the Lord. In the eighth verse we have not this, but the manifestation of it. Can you not understand that the

Lord is to present Himself, without being seen by the world, making Himself visible simply to those for whom He comes, and whom He gathers to Himself? In due time, having sent out fresh testimony, but finally allowed the worst evil to ripen up into the last fearful head, He comes in judgment with His saints. This evidently falls in with what I have already shown to be the two parts of the coming of Christ. And the reason for the interval it will be observed, lies here. First, as long as the church is on earth, with the Holy Ghost acting in personal presence and power, there cannot be full development either in the apostasy or in the manifestation of the man of sin. This consequently is one obvious reason why the Lord — as it seems to me necessarily — gathers His own to be with Himself before the evil of man and of Satan rises to such a climax that He must come and judge it.

But there is another reason involved in what has been already said. The Lord has signified His purpose to have another witness. There is to be the preparation of an earthly people for Him, when the heavenly people are taken away to be with Himself. The Spirit of God — though not in personal presence as now — will not fait to seal for God a certain number from all Israel. He will also, I apprehend, deal with the consciences of countless Gentiles. (Rev. 7) If it were not so, the sad issue would be that, when the Lord Jesus comes in judgment of evil at the end of this age, there would be a universal waste, a wilderness scene, without a single soul to welcome its Lord — without even a nucleus for the millennial earth. But no; He will prepare a people for His appearing. He will not merely spare the dark and distant parts of the earth, but, as always, a remnant elsewhere; and so it is, then, that God will quicken, bless, and use a remnant of

Jews. Some of them will carry the gospel of the kingdom to all nations. When the Lord Jesus gathers to Himself the heavenly saints, according to the first verse of this chapter — when He brings them to His Father's house, during the interval before they return with Him in glory, the earth's lawlessness will rise up to denial of God and direct worship of man. The Spirit of God in the midst of that wicked state will work, not in the way of communion and present blessing, but of prophecy or anticipated good to individual souls. The testimony, though true, is feeble; there may not be such power as to shut out the workings of Satan. It will be once more man's hour, and the power of darkness. But there will be a preparation for what is coming.

It may be well to say that I do not think the moment of the removal of the church will be that of the instant manifestation of the lawless one. Though generally true, I believe there will be an interval between the two; and it is especially in this interval — the early days after the Lord has taken His own to be with Himself — that He touches the hearts of not a few before the evil one has yet fully brought out his plans. There will be, in fact, a new testimony, suited of course to that time; and there will be extraordinary witnesses raised up and preserved, so that the devil may not be able to put them down till their hour is come. You see the two witnesses in Revelation 11. They are sustained of God to the hurt of their enemies. After an allotted time they fall, but not till their work is done. Do you suppose that the work is vain ? Do you imagine that no souls will receive the testimony of the two witnesses? I cannot agree with you. The Lord will use and apply it — will surely bring individuals to the knowledge of Himself, — feebly,

perhaps, but suitably to the work He is going to accomplish. And thus, when the Lord Jesus returns in His glory — when it is not only His presence, but the manifestation of His presence, — then every eye shall see Him, and not only those that look for Him. These will have been caught up already; but when He appears with the clouds of heaven, and His saints with Him, then every eye shall see Him; and He will destroy the lawless one. He will cast the beast and the false prophet into the lake of fire. There will be a judgment of the living or quick that must fall according to divine wisdom on man. There will be a gathering of the nations to be judged in their natural bodies and circumstances (I am not speaking of the final judgment of the dead raised up), and the millennium will take its course after all the process of judging those caught in open rebellion has been finished. This is the general scheme of the word of God on this solemn topic.

I shall not add more today, hoping, if the Lord will, on the appointed day, to address such as may be here on the elders in heaven I shall hope then to give some proofs as to the intermediate state of things, which I could hardly be expected to do fully in a single discourse.

1 Dean Alford says, “Instant, already begun; for this is the meaning of ἐνεστῶσαν, not imminent, shortly to come.” But is this sound English? He means what I do, but his expression seems faulty. “Instant” would be generally considered as substantially like “imminent,” rather than as “present.”

The Coming and Day of the Lord viewed morally - 2 Thess. 2:1, 2

My object tonight is not so much to prove the certainty of the Lord's return as to endeavour to set forth its value, and to show how it connects itself with all that is most precious morally in God Himself, and therefore, like all other truths, bound up with Christ. I therefore shall not so much speak to souls that have never heard — or have not in some measure received — the general testimony of scripture to the coming of the Lord Jesus, as take a somewhat comprehensive glance, assuming that those who are now present have already to a certain extent made this truth their own.

One difficulty from which souls have suffered is this, that they confound two distinct parts of the Lord's coming. We have them both brought before us in the two verses just read. "We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him." Here it is scarcely possible to avoid some perception of the object of the Spirit of God in what He is applying to the brethren. He beseeches the brethren by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and their re-union with Him on high, that "ye be not soon shaken in mind." It is clear that the Holy Ghost used the presence of Christ and its effect in gathering the saints to Him as a motive of comfort and stay to their souls in the face of agitating rumours. They were therefore not to be "soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of the Lord is present" (or "come").

It seems superfluous to dwell particularly on what has been often done before. I need not now stop to prove that the reading is the day of “the Lord” rather than “Christ,” or that the version is not “at hand,” but “present,” or actually arrived. I am entitled to both points as already ruled. No doubt this may be somewhat startling to those who have not examined the subject fully, but it is now conceded by competent scholars everywhere; even the last point is generally admitted by persons who were themselves originally and strongly opposed. It is simply a question in fact, first, of the actual title that the Spirit of God wrote, and next of our giving the last word its true and regular force. No critic of weight any longer hesitates to receive κυρίου for the vulgar Χριστοῦ. The meaning of ἐνέστηκεν has been more questioned. Certain however it is that what is translated here being “at hand” never means this in scripture, if indeed it ever means so anywhere else; but it is sufficient for my purpose to say that the Spirit of God never employs it in that sense. When He means “at hand,” He uses a different expression.

The report spread was that the well-known day of trouble was already come. Of course those who spread abroad such a rumour must have taken the day of the Lord in some spiritual way, because it was very evident that the world at large abode much as before, and that judgment-day in a literal sense was not as yet. There were trials, persecutions, and troubles of various kinds at that time, which were taken hold of in order to make out that the day of the Lord in some sort was already arrived. Nor is this by any means an uncommon thing in the history of souls or of Christendom. There have been several epochs before in the world when people

pretended that the last day was come. And we may find something that may help you in this point of view in the second Epistle to Timothy, where we learn those were not wanting who propagated the notion that the resurrection was past already. Clearly they must have taken the resurrection in some figurative way to set up such a pretension. But, understand it as they might, their doctrine is certain. However we may explain, or try to explain, the character and grounds of the errors which the Spirit of God guards against in both passages, we must own the fact and the plain meaning of the words. The false teachers in the one place insisted that the day of the Lord was arrived, and in the other they said that the resurrection was already past, or had actually come. The truth is that neither one nor other could be till Christ Himself had come; and this is what the Spirit of God pre-supposes more particularly in the very verse before. “We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of the Lord is present.” Do not believe that it is set in. Do you not know that the Lord Jesus is coming to gather you to Himself first?

Now the Thessalonian saints were feebly aware of this, not at all clear as to it. They had been lately led to expect that the day of the Lord might somehow fall with its troubles before the Lord Jesus came — the blessed object of hope for the believer. That is, they did not know the right mutual relation between the day of the Lord and the coming of the Lord. They had seen in the Old Testament, where the day of Jehovah is frequently spoken of, that a special time of disaster on any nation is

called “the day of the LORD,” as for instance with Egypt, or Babylon. So here it would appear from the first Epistle to the Thessalonians that the believers were going through considerable trouble; for the apostle was afraid that Satan might tempt them because of their tribulation. The enemy did take advantage of this by a misuse of the Old Testament, and false teachers pretended that the day of terror and trial, of clouds and darkness, was already come. No, says the apostle, we beseech you by the coming of our Lord Jesus, and our gathering together unto him, that ye be not troubled by anything of the sort. That day is not come.

These false teachers, it is plain from what follows, were not merely deceived; some at least were deceivers. This is certain from the fact that they pretended to have a letter written by the apostle Paul to the effect that the day of the Lord was actually come. There are, or have been, Christians who apply this to the first epistle. They are mistaken. The language will not bear a reference to that epistle. If the apostle had meant his first epistle, he would have said, “By letter from us,” or “by our letter.” He on the contrary speaks after another sort, “by letter as from us;” that is, “by letter purporting to be through us.” “As from us” does not mean that it really was, but that they said it was. In short, therefore, it was not a misunderstanding of the inspired Epistle to the Thessalonians, though they may have sought to extract some support from it; but what the apostle here warns against is, that they had gone so far as to present a pretended letter from the apostle to the effect that the day of the Lord was already come.

Then in the remaining part of the chapter, from the third verse, the apostle gives them another ground against

this thought. In short, he says that the day of the Lord cannot come until there is the falling away or the apostasy, and the man of sin is revealed — two great stages of evil which must be fulfilled before the day of the Lord comes. For this there is a very simple reason. The day of the Lord supposes divine judgment executed on an evil state of things on the earth. In the Old Testament we find it also in a preparatory or providential way; but the New Testament only speaks of it in its complete form, when our Lord Jesus will Himself be the executor of that judgment. Now there was the point in which these deceivers were mistaken (for very possibly they were deceived while at the same time they were deceivers): the New Testament only points to the day of the Lord in its final and full sense. The attempts, therefore, to apply the scriptures of the New Testament in a preparatory or providential way were altogether erroneous. That day could not come, he says, “except there come the falling away first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.” Then he develops the dreadful character of the man of sin, and explains that the ripe and manifest evil which is to be judged when our Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in flaming fire is to be the result of what was already secretly at work. He says “the mystery of iniquity” (or lawlessness) “doth already work; only there is one who now letteth” (or hindereth) “until he be taken out of the way, and then shall the lawless one be revealed.” I prefer the word “lawlessness” instead of “iniquity” in verse 7, and “lawless one” instead of “wicked” in verse 8, because the apostle means not so much the general evil that is in the world as a very special consummation both of the principle and of the practice of lawlessness, and then of

a certain lawless personage that is singled out in the scripture as the object of divine judgment at the close.

Thus it is seen we have the connection of the mystery or secret of lawlessness which was already at work with that result. It was going on when the apostle wrote; and the hidden leaven of evil, the mystery of lawlessness, will continue to work until it issues in this person, the lawless one, when it will be no longer secret but an open manifestation, defying God and trampling on all truth in the world — a complete abandonment of all revelation, and a rising up in personal pride and antagonism against the Lord Himself. This is the lawless one or the Antichrist of St. John. I do not mean antichrists, but the Antichrist who is spoken of as the great object of divine dealing when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven. So he says here, “Then shall that lawless one be revealed whom the Lord Jesus” — for so it is written, the word “Jesus” having dropped out of the common Bible, “whom the Lord Jesus” — “shall consume by the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness” (or rather shining forth, ἐπιφανείᾳ) “of his coming.”

Now I have read this because it makes plain a very important point for those who have not seen it before. “The coming” of the Lord Jesus is the general expression; “the day” of the Lord is a particular part of it. When the Lord is revealed in His “day,” it is still His “coming;” but the Lord might come for purposes of grace before the arrival of what scripture calls His day, for this simple reason, that the day, as can be shown from various scriptures, always involves two things — manifestation and (if it be the world that is in question) judgment, which the coming of the Lord Jesus does not. The day of the Lord implies manifestation and judgment;

but this is not all the Lord will do. The coming of the Lord Jesus therefore is what we may call the generic term; it is the broader and more general form of expressing the great truth; whereas the day of the Lord in the full sense is that particular phase of His presence in which He deals with what is opposed to God, and displays Him righteously before man. Thus in verse 8 it is the day, though not expressly so designated; but the shining forth of His presence is clearly judicial, as the context shows, and manifest by the force of the phrase itself, and hence means the day of the Lord. So does the presence or coming of "the Son of man," as in Matt. 24, where the phrase conjoined, being the παρουσία of the Lord as judge, modifies the sense and necessarily implies that day.

It is too often assumed that the coming of our Lord and His day are all one and the same thing; but where this is done, it is impossible to understand the proper force of scripture. Take this place, where the apostle beseeches them by the one that they be not troubled about the other. How could he beseech them by any thing that they should not be disturbed by the same thing? Where the sense or propriety of this? But we can perfectly understand that the day of the Lord is to be the time when evil must be put down, when there is beyond measure trouble and confusion among men, when solemn judgments press on and the Lord's hand is stretched out till the result is complete, that it is associated with images of human terror, and indeed with reality of divine judgment executed on the earth. The saints then are by the apostle besought, by that bright hope of Christ's presence which was full of comfort and blessedness to themselves, not to be troubled about the

tremendous intervention of the Lord in His day, which was full of anxiety and trouble to those settled down in the earth.

Nor does this of course depend on a single particular scripture. I shall draw your attention to several parts of the word of God, and then show, as I trust, the immense moral principles of truth that are underneath this difference, so as to make it evident that we have no mere verbal distinction, but real and grave truths, which flow out of God's own nature and run through His word.

Here, however, it is easy to point out in the same passage the evident difference, and even contrast, between the two things. Before leaving the passage, you will observe that the latter part of verse 8 speaks of "the brightness of his coming." It is the very same word that is rendered elsewhere "the appearing," and hence would here mean "the appearing of his coming." If His coming always implied brightness or appearing, there would be no particular point, but tautology rather, in saying "the appearing of his coming." If on the other hand the coming of the Lord does not necessarily or of itself imply manifestation, then it would require " the appearing of his coming" to define that the Lord will then be made manifest to the world. And this I believe to be the simple truth.

Hence, therefore, we might affirm that it would not be correct to say "by the appearing (or the day) of the Lord and our gathering together then." On the other hand to say, "whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with his coming," would scarcely be according to the exactitude of scripture. In order to give precision to the thought, the Spirit of God

was pleased to say that He shall destroy him with “the appearing of his coming.” This no doubt is substantially the same thing as “the day of the Lord;” that is, it is not merely His coming, but His coming made manifest; it is the coming or presence of the Son of man when every eye shall see Him. Now, if He always be manifest when He comes, where would be the reason for saying “the appearing of his coming?” but if He can come and accomplish very important objects by His presence without appearing, then we can understand that it is necessary where there is also manifestation to say so.

This, then, I believe is what we really ought to gather from the expression of the Holy Spirit here. In short, in the first verse the Spirit of God speaks of His coming without a word about the appearing. In the eighth verse He speaks about not the coming only but the appearing — the manifestation of His coming. Now observe the difference. When the coming alone is spoken of, what is the connection? What the revealed effect of His coming? “We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of the Lord Jesus and our gathering together unto him.” The effect of the Lord’s coming or presence (for such is the strict meaning of παρουσία), is that the saints are gathered to be with the Lord. Whether found sleeping or awake — in other words, whether alive or dead — the saints are gathered to be with Christ. “We beseech you by the coming of our Lord Jesus and our gathering unto him.” The moment the Lord Jesus comes — not when He appears, but when He comes and instead of being absent is present — the saints at once are assembled to be with Him above. But the lawless one is not judged until the Lord not merely comes but appears. Therefore it is said, “whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the

spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the appearance of his coming." The manifested presence of the Lord is appointed and said in the word to deal with the adversary.

Hence therefore the coming of the Lord, and the appearing of His coming, or His day, are two distinct facts. He can come and receive His saints, and afterwards He will appear and put down the adversary. Perhaps the objection might be raised, and it is well to meet it at once, "But why should He not come and deal with the adversary first, and then gather the saints to Himself?" The answer is best met by the question, What saith the scripture? On such matters we can have no light but the Bible. But it would seem that this is in part the error the apostle combats. The false teachers were alarming the saints with the notion that the day of the Lord was already come. I grant you that they could only in this have meant the day in a kind of figurative way, perhaps believing that the day ultimately would be still more tremendous. Some, however, use figures to destroy realities. Otherwise if only a figurative day of the Lord filled them with trouble, surely the final day of the Lord would be still more tremendous if it could happen without their being gathered to the Lord first. Certain it is that by their sense of "the day of the Lord" before His presence to gather them to be with Him, they were shaken in mind and troubled: how much more if they had looked for that day in all its force with the saints left on the earth when the Lord will crush this kingdom and humble that, destroying the beast, the false prophet, as well as households, with his saints mixed up in so fearful a hurly-burly of this world! I need not say how unlike all

this would be to the ways of the Lord with those whom He loves.

But we do not need to come to mere inferences. To tell you the truth, I always distrust any doctrine on any subject that depends on mere illative reasoning. If you cannot give me scripture for what you say, do not say it; and I would advise you, if I may so do, to beware of it yourselves. How can anything be of faith that is merely inferential or a development? You ought to have scripture; and these are times when we cannot afford to have anything less than the plain word of God. God, who is ever considerate of the simple, and graciously thinks of the wants of souls that do not know much, does give His revealed mind for whatever is to be believed, and therefore it is not a mere theory we want — a consequence drawn from something else — perhaps a theory built upon theory. Nothing of the sort is here, but the plain word of God for the believer.

In another Epistle the apostle lays it down as a doctrine bound up with most important consequences, that "when Christ who is our life shall appear, we shall appear with him in glory." This is the more important as he is contrasting two different states of Christ. He says that "our life is hid with Christ in God." Christ is now hidden. So long as He is thus, our life too is hidden. "When Christ who is our life shall appear," in contrast with being hidden, "then we shall also appear." If you give this full force, it would be thus: "When Christ who is our life shall be manifested" (which is really the full and proper word), "then shall we also" (then, not before, and not after, but at that time) "be manifested with him in glory." It is seen at once that the moment of the Lord's appearing is the moment of the church's

appearing along with Him. The Lord, therefore, cannot appear a second before the glorified saints appear along with Him. When the Lord is manifested, the saints are so also, being already with Him. And this entirely agrees with the plain statement of symbolic scripture, where we have the times and the seasons more fully than anywhere else in the New Testament. If there is any book in the apostolic writings where we should expect to have prophetical measures, it is certainly in the Revelation. Now in that chain of predictions — the most important book of prophecy for the Christian — the day of the Lord of course has its place. We find the full statement of the Lord's appearing from heaven in judgment. It is given in detail in Revelation 19. "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire," and so on. In verse 14 we read, "And the armies which were in the heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean." Now there it is most evident that when the heavens open for the appearing in glory, they open not merely for Christ, but for those that are Christ's. "The armies which were in heaven" (the heavenly saints are no longer on the earth) "followed him on white horses clothed in fine linen, white and clean." I grant you that this retinue and dress might be supposed to be angelic; and it is not denied that angels follow the Lord. But it is plain that those who are described here are not angels, for this simple reason, that they are said to be "clothed in fine linen, white and clean;" and in the very same chapter (verse 8) the fine linen is said to be "the righteousness of saints" — not of angels. We know nothing at all about the righteousness of angels. They

are never in the Bible spoken of as righteous. They are without sin, being sustained as in their original integrity and purity; but this is not the meaning of righteousness.

Consistency with our relationship is ever spoken of, as far as the creature is concerned, as either conferred by the Lord Jesus Christ, or as the fruit of the Holy Spirit's practical action in the soul. Righteousness therefore may be either that which we are accounted in Christ — what is commonly called imputed righteousness — when by faith the believer though unrighteous in himself is accounted righteous in the Lord, which is perfectly true, and a very important truth; or, on the other hand, it is that which the Spirit of God exercises us in practically day by day. I have not the slightest doubt that in this case the reference is to the latter. "The fine linen is the righteousness of saints." For this reason the word really means here "righteousnesses." It is a different form of word, and plural. If it were a question of what we are made in Christ, neither would be the case. The righteousness which we are made in Christ is the same righteousness for every one that is made it. As in sin, so in righteousness — there is "no difference." Here John is speaking about the righteousnesses of each saint, and the more as we find the saints spoken of as a whole. "Righteousnesses" is a phrase impossible to apply to what we are made in Christ; because, if this were the case, the result would be, one made one measure and another made another measure, which would be inconsistent with the revealed doctrine of divine righteousness. But when we come to look at the practical display of righteousness, of course there are differences. The exact meaning of the word is "righteousnesses of the saints," as in any accurate

translation by such as profess to give the precise sense you will find it to be what I am here stating; for we are not now entering on disputed points. There are proper seasons for discussing delicate shades of meaning; but I am speaking now of what is commonly allowed by all fair enquirers, whatever their system may be.

This then seems a very decisive scripture. For thus the Lord Jesus, followed by the risen saints, comes from heaven for the execution of judgment on earth. It is the day of the Lord, the brightness or appearing of His coming when He destroys the lawless one. But when He so comes He is not alone. Others beyond angels are with Him — faithful, called, and chosen. (Rev. 17:14.) He is followed by the armies that are in heaven. Of course these saintly hosts must have been caught up there before. The scene does not suit the separate spirits of the saints. They are never so described. They would not be seen mounted on white horses any more than on thrones: both, I grant, symbols of course; but not of saints in the separate state. They are saints already glorified. In short therefore we learn another fact — not only that the Lord Jesus comes and receives the saints, but that He takes them up to heaven; so that when the wickedness of the world completely develops, which may follow the translation in a very short time, then the heaven opens, and the Lord comes with the glorified saints attending Him. Any one who is acquainted with the structure of the book of Revelation will see that what I am now stating is only a reproduction of what the Spirit of God clearly reveals there.

For, only to say a few words more, what is it we find in the book? I should say this. First of all are the seven churches, — a complete view of the church state. After

this we have churches no more. When the last of these Apocalyptic assemblies has been brought before us — the seven churches of Asia, though as I believe looking out prophetically — there is not a word more about churches on the earth. The true way of accounting for the fact so pictured here is, that the Lord comes and takes away those who are now in a church condition, waiting for Him according to His promise. For how is that state to close otherwise? It was not man that began the church at Pentecost, it was God; and He only will put an end to that condition; and this He will do by receiving to the Lord Jesus those that belong to Him, and are waiting for Him. Accordingly heaven is opened immediately after, or at any rate a door is opened in heaven, and the prophet sees a body never before seen in heaven — the twenty-four elders. Angels had been seen, seraphim and cherubim, the Son of man, and even the Ancient of days; but who had ever heard of elders in heaven before? How came they there? They were the saints caught up to be with the Lord. He had taken them to Himself on high. And this is entirely confirmed by the fact, that the elders are seen to be crowned and throned. As they are invested with royal dignity, they further have vials full of odours or incense. Thus they are both kings and priests. There can be no doubt therefore that these elders are not angels but glorified saints. For there is another thing to take notice of; that is, they are complete, they are twenty-four. Now that number most evidently answers to the courses of priesthood — the only twenty-four that I am aware of which is given in scripture. They are the heads of the priesthood; for afterwards we know there were others made priests, but there were no more heads of the priesthood. They were the chief priests, so to speak, of

the heavenly hierarchy. These are no other, in my judgment, than the Old Testament and the New Testament saints caught up at the coming of the Lord Jesus to be with Himself. Afterwards others are seen in the vision put to death, martyrs at the end of the age during the time of unparalleled trouble, who become not elders but priests, not chiefs, if one may so speak, but simply priests. How blessed to be so! Yet they do not arrive at the dignity of the twenty-four. Thus the elders have a very special place; and accordingly there is never an addition to their number. Others may be called and blessed; but the elders remain twenty-four as before from beginning to end. It confirms this to see that from chap. 19, to which I have already referred, we do not hear a word more about the elders. They disappear. Why? Because the Lord Jesus will have come from heaven, whither He will have taken them up, and when afterwards spoken of, it is as His armies or hosts. Then comes the question of making war on a guilty world. Elders do not make war; but hosts do. Consequently the figure of the elders is dropped, and that of armies is taken up. There can be no solution, it appears to me, of the case other than this — at least I am not aware of any other that has even an appearance of meeting the conditions of the problem.

Further, all this is precisely in accordance with what we have seen to be the doctrine of the Apostle Paul. He urges on the saints to be always expecting the coming of the Lord. He teaches them that, while the Lord is hidden, they too must be; that when the Lord is manifested, they shall be manifested along with Him in glory. Consequently the coming of the Lord cannot at first be manifest, because if the Lord Jesus appeared

when He came to receive the saints, He would appear in heaven and they would be still on the earth: He would be appearing in glory without the saints; whereas the doctrine of scripture is that when the Lord shall be manifested, they shall be manifested along with Him in glory. (Col. 3:4.)

Thus, putting together what we have seen, nothing can be more simple. He will come again. Instead of being absent, He comes and the saints at once rise to meet Him in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. He takes them to heaven, to the presence of the Father. Afterwards the right moment comes for the Lord Jesus to appear; and when He appears, they appear along with Him in glory. Thus you see these various statements of scripture perfectly harmonize when the two different steps or stages of the Lord's coming are understood; whereas when they are not taken account of, many and serious difficulties rise up; one part of the word does not agree with another, which is always the effect wherever we have not before us the full and simple truth of God. Whenever you have only part of the truth, still more if you accredit a mistake, there is some other portion that will not agree. When you have received the truth in simplicity, then the different parts which seemed disconnected and opposed all fall into their proper places. When it is seen accordingly that the coming of the Lord first is brought before us gathering the saints to be with Him, and then that He not only comes but appears in glory, and the saints follow Him out of heaven and appear in glory too, all is made plain.

Further, the interval between the coming of the Lord and the appearing of His coming is the time that Satan busily employs to bring forward his great plot of the

apostasy and the man of sin. It is the time when the mystery of lawlessness ceases to be a mystery, when the lawlessness that was working secretly issues up into its full development and the lawless one shall be revealed; and the revolt is so direct and complete that God, as it were, acts on the impossibility of tolerating it more. The Lord Jesus, therefore, as the Word of God then as ever, comes forth and judges this excessive and destructive rebellion against God where men boast most here below. But then His own glorified saints are with Him; and this, it will be seen, puts the whole case in a clear light as to the scriptures. Nor is this the only result. There is another remark or two to be made which will be found of importance.

We know that in God Himself there are two qualities that especially display themselves in dealing with His people. The first is His grace, the second His righteousness. In the cross of Christ the grace of God and the righteousness of God meet in perfect concord and join in the blessing of the believer. So in our daily walk with God, who does not find that His grace brings us into a certain position of blessing where, if we fail, the Lord has a righteous government in which He chastises us? This is the reason why you may find such an one so much more troubled, so much more in sorrow, affliction, and humiliation, because he is a child of God, if he have failed as a servant of God and grieved the Spirit. The Lord does not abandon His love — His grace abides, as does its fruit also. Grace has brought that soul to God out of the world. Does God repent of His grace because the soul needs to repent, as having fallen into what is evil, grievous, and humbling? Not so. Does God then say, As he is my child, I pass all over? No, He never

passes over the faults of the Christian. There is where we learn the faithful yet holy provision of His love. His grace shall never be given up. On the other hand, His righteous government must always take its way. Hence it was with the Corinthians, who really were believers, as the apostle was told when he went to the city — that city of corruption and vileness. The Lord had much people there; though if there was a spot in the world where the holy apostle might have been afraid to put his foot and to live, it was Corinth. It was notoriously the vilest of the vile. But the Lord had much people there. At Athens He had comparatively few people. But at Corinth the apostle had learnt what he could not have gathered otherwise, and therefore went on; and even when many of them went sadly astray, falling into grievous disorder and sin, he did not give up his confidence that the Lord owned them as His people. But he told them, and told them in the most solemn manner, that if they did not judge themselves, they would be judged of the Lord; and that, when they were judged, they were chastened of Him that they should not be condemned with the world. For with the Lord sin must be judged; sin can never be tolerated where He is named. If we, therefore, through carelessness allow sin, one of two things is evident. If we have no portion in Christ, we must ourselves be judged for it everlastingly; and, if so, how can we be but lost? But if the grace of God has really brought us to Himself by Jesus Christ our Lord, He deals with us, sends affliction on us, and perhaps even takes away natural life (1 John 5), that we should not be condemned with the world. Thus the righteous government of God must take its course and do its work; and this no less in mercy to us than in vindication of His own glory.

As this is true even in our ordinary walk, as these two principles are most clearly united in the cross, are they absent from the coming of the Lord? Not so. Grace or righteousness is always found. How then can they be applied to the future according to God? As the coming of the Lord consists of the two parts already distinguished, it will be found on examination that, where scripture simply speaks of the coming of the Lord as such without any reference to manifestation or judgment, it is invariably the answer to the grace of God. And this may be seen readily by the simplest believer. For, let me ask, why does the Lord Jesus come again? and why are the saints gathered up to be with Him above? Because of His absolute grace. If it were not for grace, do you suppose that the Lord Jesus would leave the glory of heaven and the presence of His Father? Certainly not. And if the Lord Jesus could leave that glory to come, how could He gather up such as you and me to be with Him at once? How could we be taken into the presence of God in light and blessedness, in peace and joy and rest for ever? From no other principle than His grace. It is grace and nothing but grace that can adequately account for the coming of the Lord for us and our gathering to be with Him. Therefore we understand that this is the richest and fullest motive of comfort that the apostle Paul could bring to bear on the souls of the saints to dispel the injurious notions which the instruments of Satan were spreading.

For let me explain further, that there are two ways, in one or other of which you will find heterodoxy to indulge, and you may know teachers to be false by their indulgence in them. One of these ways of error is the effort to give a spurious, groundless comfort to those

who rather need warning and conviction. The other feature of false doctrine is, that it seeks to rob of comfort those whom God fills with peace and joy in believing. In short, false teachers either strive to comfort those that are of the world as such while they still remain worldly, and are really unbelievers and unquickened by the Spirit of God; or, on the other hand, they endeavour to alarm and shake the confidence of those that have unfeigned faith in the Lord Jesus. It is for you to make the application; but to you it will soon appear, unless I am greatly mistaken, and the more it is examined with the fuller evidence, that into one or other of these two ditches false teachers habitually fall. Thus there never is the distinctness of revealed truth; there never is the sense of the authority of the Lord over the soul; there is never confidence in God for eternal life. Uncertainty Godward there is, and this on principle, which makes it so mischievous. There is the endeavour that, on the one hand, the believer should not be confident, happy, or thoroughly at rest in the Lord, which is surely of the devil. On the other hand, there is the endeavour that the worldly person should not be too much cast down, or really alarmed about his soul. “We must have charity. You do not know but that the Lord is dealing with that soul. Perhaps, after all, he may be a Christian: how can you tell? Be not presumptuous in believing yourself or in doubting him.” Now all such thoughts flow from the same kind of deceivers as the apostle Paul was dealing with in his day; and the truth of God is clean contrary to the ways of the enemy in both respects.

Applying this to the present subject, we think of the believers at Thessalonica: What was the way of the Holy

Ghost with them? To keep their minds bright, fervent, and happy in the constant expectation of the Lord Jesus. You cannot be too happy in Christ; you cannot too much confide in the truth and grace of God. You may be too confident in yourself; and there is the great and frequent mistake. You may be careless in your ways, but this you do not owe to Jesus. On the contrary, because you are a Christian, your heart should be exercised every day, whether you are growing in the Lord, whether you are advancing in the knowledge of Him, whether you are serving and glorifying Him according to what you know to- day, not excusing failure according to what was not known yesterday. We must not allow ignorance in the past to hinder us in the present. Our responsibility is always according to what the Lord has shown in our souls now. These Thessalonian believers then were assailed by false teachers whose great object was to take them away from their stable ground of comfort and rest in the grace of God, and to fill them with alarm because of the terrible day of trouble and judgment that is coming upon the earth, insisting that in some sort or measure it had already begun. “Not at all,” says the apostle Paul, “you hold fast your bright hope. Do you not know that the Lord Jesus is coming Himself for you, and that then you are going to be gathered up to Him? Do not be troubled by all this talk about the day of the Lord. You are going to be with Christ. Granted that His day is to come; but it cannot come till the worst evil is fully ripe.” The object of the day of the Lord is not the saints at all, but to judge the evil that is in the world, the lawlessness which is already at work secretly, and which is going to issue in the most open and appalling opposition to God. When that development has reached

its height, then the day of the Lord will come upon it, the brightness or appearing of His coming.

Thus we see how this at once restores the balance of truth. The “coming” of the Lord Jesus is the display of perfect grace. The “day” of the Lord is the execution of righteousness; it is the dealing of the Lord with what is contrary to Himself. And I add, further, it is not merely that the world will be the object of righteous dealing, but even the saints themselves; and for this reason: not that they will be judged like the world — if they were, they must be lost too; but the Lord gives scope for His righteous ways, while at the same time He does not mix up the believer and the unbeliever in judgment. The believer shall not come into judgment. It is not merely that he shall not come into condemnation, but that he does not come into judgment, such is the express teaching of the Lord Jesus in John 5. How then does the Lord reconcile all this? Perfectly. When the believers are caught up to be with Christ, they will be manifested before His judgment seat; they will give to the Lord an account of everything done by the body. The Lord accordingly will vindicate His own ways with them, and they will appreciate all His dealings as perfectly as they will judge their own. Hence, therefore, when the Lord Jesus appears in glory, the saints that are already with Him — the glorified saints — will be displayed according to either their service rendered or their faithfulness under trial. There will be different positions in glory. And on what does difference of position depend? Upon the grace of God? Not so. If it were the grace of God, all would be in the same position. It is nothing but the absolute grace of God that could save a single soul; it is precisely the same grace of God that saves you and the

apostle. There is no difference. If there could be a shade of difference in the grace, you could not get to heaven at all. The fact is there is only One who could bring you there, and that is Christ; but even Christ Himself — with reverence be it spoken — even the Saviour could not bring you there worthily of God, except by redemption. It is not the spotlessness and the perfectness of Christ — it is not Christ even perfect in all His ways here below — that brings you to heaven, though you cannot get there without all; but it is Christ suffering for you, "the just for the unjust," that brings you to God; and He suffered in the fullest way for every soul that is brought to God. In fact, it is the very same suffering of Christ on the cross that is applied to every soul that needs it.

Thus, then, we see that it is precisely the same grace displayed in and by the Lord Jesus Christ, and that it is only by His suffering as the crucified Christ that souls are brought to God. But when brought to God, then the Lord takes account of every difference. Certainly neither you nor I will have the same place in glory as the apostle Paul. For Christians in general have a sort of feeling — some may be a little more confused than others, but generally they have a just feeling — that there will be differences: only sometimes they confound things together, and often do not well distinguish between the grace that brings to God and His righteous government that arranges among those brought to God according to a just estimate of their service and suffering.

Hence, too, it is that failure will appear then. I do not at all mean by this that any one in the presence of God will not be thoroughly happy. I am persuaded that in heaven, and in the kingdom too, there will be perfect happiness for every soul that is brought to God; only the Lord will

know how to reconcile the two things. The Lord will know how to maintain every glorified one in perfect enjoyment of Him, and at the same time to display each according to his faithfulness or his lack of it. All this, doubtless, will be ordered according to the unfailing righteousness of the Lord in the kingdom; only we must remember that we shall feel them perfectly according to God. We shall delight in another's having a better place than ourselves. There will be no envy, nor jealousy whatever. All will thoroughly overflow with divine joy, and each bow in submission, delighting in it, to the will of the Lord.

This seems to connect itself very manifestly with the great subject of which I am treating. All goes to show that the difference between the coming of the Lord and the day of the Lord is not in the least arbitrary, but necessary if our future is to reflect the ways and nature of God. Who can say that it merely depends on a text here or a word there, though this would be quite enough for a believing soul that knows no more? Nor do I put the smallest slight on the man — on the contrary, I admire him — who, though he does not understand why it is, cleaves simply to scripture. This is quite right. Every one has not the same spiritual intelligence. Few can clearly explain why things are as they are in scripture: to do so supposes a certain spiritual maturity. But understanding or not understanding, hold fast what God reveals. Nevertheless it is no small comfort to the heart when, having received truth as a simple matter of faith, we have a spiritual understanding of it given to us by the Spirit of God.

I trust that what has been advanced will help souls in this way; indeed I am persuaded of it. They will see that

the coming of the Lord, when it is named simply as such, is always associated with the display of grace, and that the day of the Lord is always associated with the display of righteousness. A few scriptures may serve to make this plain.

Let me take you first of all to the first Gospel, and we shall find there somewhat that bears on the subject. In Matthew 25 we have the parable of what is called “The Ten Virgins;” and there we are told that they took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. “And at midnight,” while the bridegroom tarried, and they had all slumbered and slept, “there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.” The foolish wanted oil: the wise had no oil to give them as they said, “lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage.” And what is its character morally? Is it the display of righteousness? Certainly not, but of grace. Thus it is no question at all of faithfulness being manifested to the world; it is merely the intimate privilege of being with the Bridegroom. It is not the virgins appearing with Him; for they are not so shown. It is an inner scene. They go forth to meet the Bridegroom; the Bridegroom comes; and they go in with Him to the marriage.

It may interest some to know that the parable really closes with the words, “Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour.” The words “wherein the Son of man cometh” are an unauthorized addition to the parable. The words were no doubt put in because they occurred elsewhere in the discourse; but it is perfectly

well known to those acquainted with these matters that the clause has no sufficient title to be there. Be it noted that there is not a word about the Son of man in the parable unless there. A spiritual mind would see that "Son of man" does not agree with the tone of the parable. The Lord is presented not as Son of man, in which capacity judgment is given to Him, but as Bridegroom. What has a bridegroom to do with judgment? It is plain that the whole scope of the passage is a certain scene of joy and blessedness into which the Lord will introduce those that wait for Him. He has called them from this world to wait for Himself; but while He tarries all prove unfaithful. The Lord, however, in His love causes a warning to go forth in time to them all; but those that had not the oil of the Spirit, the unction from the Holy One, lost themselves in vainly seeking it, and in fact were shut out. Those who had the unction were ready, and went in to the marriage. It is clearly Christians as distinct from those who were merely nominal professors; for if they had been true believers, they would not have wanted the oil. Can we rightly think of a Christian that has not the Holy Ghost? Is it not the distinctive privilege of all such? It might be needless to say so, but for those who have speculated about it, and argued that the foolish ones must have had oil. Why reason thus? The scripture says, not that they had a little oil, but that they had none. The teaching is perfectly plain, and it is only when men have a troublesome theory of their own that they find these difficulties. But you say that their lamps had been burning. True, the wick burned a little while, but it did not burn long without oil. There is really no difficulty if we believe what the Lord says, that they took no oil. Thus, taking the oil as always in the language of

scripture for the Spirit, they had not the Spirit. “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”

But in the connection we have another view. Take the very next parable, where we have the different servants who are weighed and approved by the Lord Jesus according to their success or not in trading with the talents given them. There we find government, righteous government, taking account of the differences among them. Accordingly we find that one has made two talents, and another five. Differences are found here, no difference on the part of the virgins. All five wise virgins, all those that had oil, go in one as much as another. There was no difference among them: when you are on the ground of grace, difference is not the point; but when you enter that of righteous government, difference instantly appears. Then, we readily observe, there are differences not only between the faithful as compared with the unfaithful, but between the faithful as compared with one another. Thus scripture is perfectly harmonious.

Without wishing to notice every passage, let us look at the Gospel of Luke. In Luke 12:35 we read, “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.” What is this? Righteous government? Not in the least. It is grace and nothing else. The Lord come forth and serve us! Have we any claim to this? We! Certainly not. It is a deeper

blessedness, even that of such as we, to have the Lord the Son of God serving them in the fulness of His grace. “Blessed are those servants, then, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching.”

But let us look a little farther on in the chapter at the reply of our Lord to Peter, who asked, “Speakest thou this parable to us, or even unto all? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom the lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom the lord when he cometh shall find so doing.” The moment you come to our “doing,” you involve righteous government, which estimates conduct displayed in practical facts. Of course differences are seen there; and there the lord makes the faithful servant ruler over his household. He gives one a position of rule here, another of rule there, and these are not the same; as we find in chapter 19 of the same Gospel, one is made a ruler over five cities, another is made a ruler over ten cities, speaking now parabolically, according to the language of the Lord.

Thus the first is the ground of grace, the effect of which is that you are found watching for Christ. Here it is not what you are to be; it is Christ Himself that fills the heart. You love Him, and therefore watch for Him. You do not even consider what position you are going to be placed in, which is another thought altogether, when every man receives according to his work. Here it is simply the heart fixed on an object that is dearer to it than all others, the effect of which is that you watch for Him; you delight in the Lord Jesus; and “blessed are those servants whom the lord when he cometh shall find

watching.” For then is the fulness of His own grace: He comes forth and serves them, as we have seen.

But if I am found faithfully doing whatever the Lord calls me to here, this is not forgotten. If you are a faithful servant, the Lord will make you an honoured ruler. If you have been faithful in a little, He will exalt you over much. Such is the order given, and such the manner of His dealing with us. But it is clear that here we are come to righteous government.

Thus we see then that these principles run through scripture, that it is not a capricious theory which first supposes a thing and then endeavours to squeeze other things into fit. Here we have what God Himself has written; here we have what does not depend on a mere word or two, but what is firmly rooted in the truth of scripture and in the moral principles of God Himself.

We come now to another scripture, to the Gospel of John. What do we find there? Righteous government? Not at all. It is not so that the coming of the Lord is ever presented — as far as I know, never — in his Gospel “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions.” What has this to do with righteous government? What claim have I to be in the Father’s house? None but what grace has given me. I have never done anything, I have never deserved anything, which would give me even the smallest plea why the Father should put me in the same house with the Son. How is it then that any could be brought into such unspeakable nearness and intimacy with the Father? Simply because of His own grace. “In my Father’s house,” says our blessed Lord, “there are many mansions.” He would not have us think that all the

scene of goodness was for Him alone. “In my Father’s house are many mansions.” There is room for us as well as for Christ. “If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself.” It is not to make us rulers: there is no allusion to government or its awards here. It is purely the heavenly ground of divine grace, where all other considerations vanish.

No doubt when the saints come forth from the Father’s house, and are brought before the world, then comes the question of showing how they have acted and laboured, how they have endured for His sake from a Christ-rejecting world. And the Lord Jesus will put down the thoughts of the world, and will vindicate what was of Himself in His own that suffered here below; for if we suffer, we shall reign; and if we have served Him, every man will have reward according as his own work is, as the apostle Paul teaches.

But the Father’s house where Christ takes us raises no question of service, nor is there the reward of suffering here. There is not a question of anything but the grace of God shown us by and with His Son. There was only One in the universe that had a right to be there, and this was the Son of God; but sovereign grace shares the place of Christ with those that deserve nothing but hell. Thus therefore what we find here is the fulness of the grace of the Son of God that will bring us into the self-same place that He enjoys Himself. This can be no other than simply grace. I am not aware that the coming of the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of John is ever connected with righteous government. Hence we never find here anything about the Son of man coming in the clouds of

heaven. We never find here His sending forth His angels to purge His kingdom. In the Apocalypse we do, because there we again enter the arena of righteous government. “Behold he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” But here is nothing of the kind; His word is, “Let not your heart be troubled.” On the earth their hearts will be troubled indeed. Thus the difference between the Gospel and the Revelation is complete.

We come now to a few scriptures in the epistles, in which I shall show that the difference is one that runs through the word of God. In the Epistle to the Romans — just to take the first that comes to hand — “The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.” (Rom. 13:12) We see that the day is for the decision and reward of righteous conduct. Those that look for that day are to walk suitably to it now, so that the ground of righteousness is maintained in the exhortation quite in consonance with the day that is brought before us.

Again, in 1 Corinthians 1:6, 7 we read, “Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” “Ah!” I can conceive some one saying, “there you see it is His coming.” And I grant you, if it were the “coming,” it would be a great difficulty; but it is not. Looking at your margin you will find it is “the revelation of our Lord.” What a remarkable instance of the perfect accuracy of scripture! Further it shows that the excellent men who made our version were loose as to the Lord’s coming, and never departed from it

without impairing the word of God. I say, then, that the text is wrong, the margin right, and this without the smallest doubt on the matter. If it were the coming of the Lord Jesus, it would be a question of grace, which would not suit the context. But we observe that he is speaking here of their being faithful in the use of their gifts, which they were certainly far from. Hence the words are, “Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,” — corrected in the margin, as it should be, to “the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Such is the real meaning of the term. It is never translated “coming,” except here. It is always translated “revelation” elsewhere. There can be no doubt therefore what it ought to be. And mark what confirms it in the next verse: “Who shall confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Now “the day,” “the revelation,” “the appearing,” are all of a kindred character. They are distinguished from “the coming.” Where it is simply the coming, I repeat, it is regularly the action of grace. Where it is the day, or the Lord’s revelation, or the appearing of the Lord, it always brings in the ground of righteousness, and not simply of grace. Here it is plain that it is a question of faithful conduct, and accordingly “the day” and “revelation” are the true words, and not His presence or coming.

And so again in the other parts of this same epistle you will find the same principle. Thus in 1 Cor. 15:23 it is said, “Every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ’s.” When? In His day? Not at all. “At his coming.” Why? It is the resurrection, which is not at all a question of righteousness, and could not

be a reward for faithful conduct. We are not to be raised from the dead because we have been good servants, but because we are Christ's. It is pure grace that gives us such a portion with Him. We in no way deserve it. Hence, therefore, when it is a question of the display of grace towards us, it is the coming of the Lord — "they that are Christ's at his coming."

On the other hand, where the day is spoken of, as for instance in the Epistle to the Philippians, we shall find that faithful conduct or endurance is always before the mind of the Spirit of God. He says there, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it (or carry it on) until the day of Jesus Christ: even as it is meet for me to think this of you all." (Phil. 1:6) So afterwards in verse 10, "That ye may be sincere and without offence, till the day of Christ;" again, in the next chapter (Phil. 2:16) he says, "Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain." It is a question of faithful service. The day, we see, is connected with the display of how far an apostle or any other has been faithfully serving the Lord. The coming of the Lord will not do this. The effect of it is not to display us before the world, but to take us clean out to be with Christ. When the Lord returns and appears before the world, then He will display how far we have been faithful. The day therefore is bound up with the display of faithfulness. The coming of the Lord is the taking us out of the world to be with the Lord Jesus before His Father in undeserved and infinite grace.

Nothing therefore can be more distinct, as it appears to me, than the moral truth in this matter. Hence if we

examine the pastoral Epistles to Timothy and Titus, we shall find exactly the same thing. There the apostle exhorts his faithful fellow-labourer, and tells him: “I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession, that thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, till” — the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ? No; but “the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Tim. 6:13, 14) For the coming of our Lord will not prove how far Timothy has been faithful or not; His appearing will do so thoroughly. The appearing of the Lord Jesus therefore is the right and proper word, and none other. Still more plainly do we see in 2 Timothy the connection between the responsibility of the servant with the Lord’s appearing. Thus the apostle charges in 2 Tim. 4:1, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom, closing this part of his exhortation with his own service and its results: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing.” (2 Tim. 4:8) Comment here is needless, once the principle is stated and understood. The coming of the Lord as such to receive His own would be out of place in this connection.

So again we shall find His day in the Epistle to Titus. “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:11-13)

Now there it would seem that both are introduced. I think it is not merely the one but the other, the “blessed hope” being more particularly the accomplishment of our joy in being caught up to be with Christ, and the “appearing of the glory” being our manifestation before the world. This therefore is a remarkably full and rich scripture, if, as I suppose, it embraces both these truths.

Again, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, we have the day spoken of in view of responsibility. The Epistle of James presents the coming of the Lord in a rather general way. This we have seen is thoroughly correct. It is when the special side of responsibility and its results are pressed that we need and find “the day,” “appearing,” or some equivalent phrase for that side of the truth; as here “the judge standeth before the door.”

Again 1 Peter 1:7, 13, as well as 1 Peter 5:4, falls under the usual rule: the manifestation of Christ connects itself with the exhibition of fidelity in trial, and service general or special. And 2 Peter 3 seems to my mind as exquisitely exact as any other, though to a superficial glance the terms might seem there interchangeable. But it is not so. The scoffers of the last days say, Where is the promise of His coming? Unbelief is as sure of a stable unchanged world as of man’s progress. What is the answer of faith? Not the presence of the Lord but His day will come as a thief in the night. If they taunt as to the Lord’s coming with its bright hope, the Holy Spirit threatens them with the solemn affirmation that His day will come with a power which will dissolve, not merely the works of busy man, but the heavens and earth before it closes.

It is obvious that, in 1 John 2:28, 1 John 3:2, 3, the appearing or manifestation of the Lord is intended to deal with conscience.

Jude 14, again, is no more an exception than 1 Thess. 3:13; for His coming with His saints, or His presence with all His saints, is not His presence when He comes to receive them, but really coalesces with His manifestation or day, and hence links itself with their responsibility rather than with His pure and simple grace toward them.

But we need not now dwell more on this subject. What has been shown will set out, I trust, plainly and distinctly, and without too much heaping one scripture on another, the two lines of divine truth that meet in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, each having its own proper sphere and moral aim. The coming or the presence of the Lord is His grace towards us when it will have its full way. The same Jesus that died for us will come again and receive us unto Himself. He that is the object of our faith is no less of our hope. If He was the only One we could trust our souls to, He is the One that God would have us to be always expecting. It is due to Him: He deserves it at our hands; and our God would make none other than Christ Himself the proper, the worthy, the only, object of hope. But the same blessed Lord Jesus will take notice of all our works. There is no suffering for Him now which will not be remembered then. There is no service now that will not all be set in the light then. The day of the Lord Jesus, the day of Christ, will display the saints according to His own divine judgment of our ways.

Thus all the truth assuredly harmonizes in this great theme, and we see this when we see the two sides in their distinctness and their combination.

May our gracious God bless His own truth to His own children for Jesus' sake!

The Coming of the Lord

“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, that the day of Christ is at hand” (2 Thess. 2:1, 2).

There are two great parts in the future advent of our Lord Jesus Christ which need to be carefully distinguished. They are both of the greatest importance, but they have each a very distinct character; and the confusion of that which is distinct always leads to the enfeebling, if not the destruction, of the truth.

It is so with every truth of God. If I look at the person of Christ there are two great sides to it. There is His deity and His humanity. If I confound them, or use one to neutralise the other, I have lost the truth about Christ. It is not true that He is God only, nor that He is man only. Nor is it true that it is a confusion of the Godhead with the humanity of the Lord. There is His person, but most assuredly there is a Divine nature and there is a human.

So, again, if I look at the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ; there is the very fullest grace, but there is righteousness. If I forget the righteousness, undoubtedly I shall use the wondrous self-abandonment of the Son of God, who suffered for our sins, in a selfish manner. If I only see love in it, I shall make light of sin; and if I do not see love and the fulness of love in it, I shall never have peace with God. So that the confounding of things that differ — no matter what the theme you take up, or the test by which you prove the truth of it — the confounding of things that differ is one of the most

dangerous ways of losing the power of that which God reveals for the blessing of our souls.

It is not otherwise with the Second Advent, as it is called, of our Lord Jesus. There is one side of it which is the expression of the fullest love and sovereign grace. There is another side — that there will be the execution of the most solemn judgment. Here the distinction is even more marked, if possible, than in the atonement, or even in the person of our Lord, because the expression of judgment falls upon man objectively, whereas the Christian is now and ever safe in Christ. As to the person of Christ it is the same principle. One needs to be subject to the truth of God as to the deity and humanity of the Lord. In the atonement, it is just the same thing. It is the believer who reaps all the blessedness of God's unsparing judgment of sin; and it is the believer who enters into all the fruit and perfect results of God's perfect love. But in the second advent of our Lord Jesus there are different objects. It is not only that there is the twofold side of the truth, but the sovereign grace which is manifested in the coming again of our Lord Jesus will give to those who know Him a definite, distinct, and intimate relationship with Himself; whereas the execution of judgment is on those who abide His enemies. To confound these, therefore — to suppose they are bound up together in one and the same transaction — we shall find to be a mistake fraught with consequences wholly destructive of spiritual intelligence. Whereas, when we discriminate between these two things so different, then I am persuaded we are on the way to find that a great deal of the Word, otherwise hidden from the believer, will become more and more plain to him. Therefore I press very much the

distinctness of these two doctrines as an important element — as important as any other — for those who believe the Word of God.

And, one must add, it is the more necessary to do so, because the confounding of these two things is rather common — in fact, a natural tendency of the heart. I have not the slightest doubt from the translation that is given in our ordinary Bibles that those who made it — excellent men as they were, and learned — did not distinguish between the two. To me that is manifest from the mistake into which it led them — a mistake which I have not to combat now, I am thankful to say. You have all got the Revised Edition of the New Testament in your hands, I suppose, and anyone who takes the trouble to compare the Revised Version with the old, will find that what I have often insisted upon — very probably in this town — has now been effected. Undoubtedly the Revisers did not make that alteration because they believed in what I am going to set before you to-night. They did it very much as a question of language. I suspect that very few of them knew the truth in respect to the question. I say this not in the least out of a disposition to slight their knowledge of languages; and I am persuaded that they themselves would allow that this is the case — more particularly, also, as there appears to be a mistake in the way in which they translate the first verse. But they have been faithful in this, that they let you know that the true meaning of the last clause of the second verse is that the day “of the Lord” (for this is the true reading of the best copies) is (not “at hand,” but) “present.”

It is not a question of translation — in the day “of the Lord” rather than “of Christ” — it is a question of text,

and their text is better there. But the last word is a question of translation. They say, “is now present.” I need not tell you that this makes an enormous difference. To say that the day is “at hand” represents the day as future. To say that the day is “now present” is in contrast with the future. Now, there the main error lay. What our Authorised Translators say — that the day of Christ is at hand — was really true; whereas, to represent the apostle as combating its nearness is not true. It is a most serious mistake. The false teachers were preaching that the day was already come, but the Authorised Translation makes it appear that the apostle denies this to be true. Elsewhere, in the thirteenth chapter of Romans, the apostle says — “The night is far spent, the day is at hand.” He could not possibly say in chapter thirteen of Romans it is true, and that it is false in 2 Thessalonians 2:2! That is what the Authorised Translators really involve — that the apostle contradicts to the Thessalonians what he affirms to the Romans. That could not be; nor is it true. Any scholar knows that the word is quite different, and that the word “at hand” is perfectly right in Romans 13:12, and “at hand” utterly wrong in the A.V. of 2 Thess. 2:2.

The Revisers are here right. What the false teachers taught was that the day of the Lord was now come. You would naturally ask how that could be. It seems such an egregious thing to assert that the day of the Lord was already come. They clearly had a sort of figurative understanding about the day of the Lord. They knew the day of the Lord to be an outburst of trouble and perplexity — a time of darkness and thick clouds, according to the Old Testament prophets; and they pointed to all the trouble the Thessalonians were

suffering and said — “The day of the Lord is come.” The apostle says, “No; it is not arrived. It cannot come yet. There are tremendous evils which must take place before the day of the Lord can deal with them.”

The important theme to-night is not “the day of the Lord.” I merely make these preliminary observations to show you how mistaken it is to conceive of the coming of the Lord as the same thing with the day of the Lord. Beyond controversy, it is evident that the Thessalonians would not have allowed for a moment that the Lord was come. That was contrary to the sense of all — contrary to every appearance of the truth. They knew that when the Lord comes — the apostle had shown them that carefully — the dead in Christ should rise first, “and we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” All this was not come — therefore the Lord could not have come. There was some figurative meaning given to the day of the Lord, and that was exactly where the folly of the false teaching showed itself.

The apostle elaborately enters into this, for the purpose of putting both truths in their right relation the one to the other. “We beseech you, brethren” (not here in regard of, but) “by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The word the Authorised Version has translated “by” — and, I think, not improperly — is the word referred to first, and I believe we do not get so good an equivalent in the Revised Version. Thus what betrays that the Revisers did not understand the argument of the apostle is that they say “in regard of” or something equivalent. Now, by this they show that they conceived the coming of the Lord and the day of the Lord to be the same. They

thought that the subject which the apostle was discussing was the coming of the Lord. Now, this is not so. The subject under discussion is the day of the Lord. The error was that the day was present. The false teachers did not trouble themselves about the coming of the Lord; but they were very full of the day of the Lord, and they took advantage of the circumstances of the Thessalonians to say that the day had begun — that that day had actually arrived.

For what, then, does the apostle bring in, in verse 1, the coming of the Lord? To lift up their eyes from their circumstances, from their troubles, from their persecutions, from the darkness and clouds of the earth, to heaven. Do you not know that the Lord is coming — that He Himself is coming in person? No one could say that the Lord was come. This would have been so utterly to contradict common-sense that they would themselves have repudiated such an assertion. But the apostle recalls them to the great and blessed hope of the Christian. We all know — all of us who are familiar with the New Testament, with the First Epistle to the Thessalonians more particularly — that the bright hope of the Christian is that the Lord is coming. What is He coming for? Not to put away our sins: He has done that already. Not merely to bless the earth, because this is not our hope, although we expect it. There are many things we expect that are not our proper hope. What is our spiritual hope? Himself; He Himself, to take us to the Father’s house; Himself, to present us in His own beauty and glory to THE FATHER; Himself, that as He has gone into the Paradise of God He will come to fetch us there — not even leaving it to the highest angel in heaven to bring us there, but Himself will come, that the

objects of perfect favour may enjoy it where there is nothing inconsistent, where there is glory, where there is the absence of all that can grieve or distract the heart, where there is everything to promote the enjoyment of His love, and where all will be according to that love. Glory is not the highest thing, but love; and, therefore, in the seventeenth of John, our Lord Himself tells us that the glory will be the proof to the world of the love that is set upon us. But a proof to the world never can be so deep as the thing itself. We all know, supposing a subject were arrayed by his Sovereign in the most gorgeous robes, and put in a position however high, it would not be the same as enjoying the love and confidence of the Sovereign in the most intimate way. And what is a Sovereign's love compared with that of Christ? Remember, too, that it is not a love that is for a little season only, but full and for ever.

Well, then, this is the hope of the Christian; and it is of the greatest importance that you should remember this is our true hope, that the Lord Jesus will come to take us to be with Himself, and like Himself, and this where He will be for ever. It is not merely going to heaven, and still less is it reigning over the earth. I fully allow that both these things are true. God never made the earth to be merely a football for the devil. He will not allow the earth to be a place for His enemy to harass His creatures and put dishonour upon Himself. He means to make this earth a part of His glory. It may be the outer circle of it, but this earth shall know the glory of Jehovah. It is not only the knowledge of His glory, but the glory of Jehovah shall fill the earth; not merely the heavens, but the earth. The heavens are higher than the earth, and so the glory unveiled there will be of a

superior character to that which will embrace the earth. Accordingly there is where the Lord will give us this blessed hope in all its fulness and in the depths of its power; when the Son of God will come to receive us unto Himself, and present us with Himself on high the objects of God's love — the love that rests upon Him resting upon us, and ourselves brought into a suitable relationship to God. Now we are members of His body; then we shall be His bride. Of course I know, and you know, that these are but figures; but the figures of Scripture are not the flourishes of rhetoric, nor are they to be regarded as words that signify nothing; on the contrary, they signify everything that they express — that is, they are vivid images of the truth, which God will most surely make good in that great day.

But there is another thing of very great moment. You will see why it is that if Christ personally be the centre of our hope, as He undoubtedly is, it exactly falls in with all truth. What is it that makes any part of divine revelation vague or indistinct? I will tell you, separating it from Christ. If you are a believer, yet if you allow the very smallest separation of any truth from Him, if you do not see all truth in Christ and with Christ, you will be, comparatively speaking, feeble in the faith. That is the reason why, if you take up a book on theology or divinity, as it is called, it is all so cold, and has so little in it which attracts the heart. It is only a skeleton. It is not really the living Christ. Everyone feels this who has any kind of spiritual sensibility. Therefore it is that when persons draw their views from books of divinity rather than from Christ, as revealed in the Word of God, the effect on their souls is to make them cold. There may be power of reasoning, order, or even imagination in the book; but

imagination is more like the coruscations of electricity than the real, true warmth of living power. Nothing but Christ has life. Christ is our life, and the Holy Ghost will never act except in view of Christ and for Christ. The Holy Ghost has been sent down from heaven for the express purpose of glorifying Christ. He does not glorify Himself, and He certainly will not glorify any mere article of faith, although it may be true.

I do not condemn articles of faith. For my own part I rather admire the Articles of the Church of England; I don't mean the ecclesiastical or political, but the doctrinal. I consider them very fair; sound, for the most part; and certainly moderate in their statements. Even the Athanasian Creed, which many clergymen are anxious to get rid of, I consider to be the best of the three Creeds. As to the Apostles' Creed, it is a very poor affair; and I suppose you know that no apostle had ever anything to do with it. This is merely one of the frauds of the early Fathers. Then the Nicene Creed is anything but a successful production. The great point in it is, "I believe" — not in the church — "I believe the… church;" which has tended to set the church up as a teacher. But the church is nothing of the kind. It is all a mistake. God is the source of teaching. The instrumental means by which the church is taught is through His ministers, but the church does not teach. It is all an error of Popery, but it is an error that has got into all kinds of bodies very far removed from Popery. I only now refer to it to show the importance of the truth, and I say again that, while allowing the value of these articles of faith where it is set forth in creeds, still there is no life in them. They may have their value in guarding against error, or in being a kind of bulwark; but we want something more

than that. It is not enough that the house be empty, swept, and garnished. Far from it. We don't keep out error merely by an abjurement of error. We need the power of the truth. We want a living power to preserve our own souls individually. There is that which tends to death, because it tends to corruption, and there is but one thing which counteracts it all; the Holy Ghost working through the Word, and through the Word revealing Christ to men.

I say, therefore, that exactly as we see the true grace of God in all Christ's fulness of glory — because the grace of the Lord depends upon the glory of His person — so exactly is His grace efficacious and effectual. A man dying on a cross is nothing, but a Divine Person dying there is everything for God and man. A mere death on the cross, what would that be? Why, there were two men died along with Christ, and what did their death signify so far as others were concerned? One of them died an impenitent criminal. The other, through the grace of the Divine Sufferer beside him, died a blessed death. We want the death of One who can turn death into infinite and endless bliss. That is what the death of Christ effects. As the person of Christ is everything in every truth of God, so there is nothing which contains real living power apart from His person. In the future the same thing is true. Take away Christ's person, and make it merely a going to heaven, how cold a thing it will be! It is blessed, no doubt, to go to heaven; but people begin to doubt about going to heaven unless Christ is before them. They sometimes say they have doubts and fears in forgetfulness of Christ.

Who could look in the face of the Lord Jesus and say they have doubts and fears? Certainly the penitent thief

had not. He had been a sinner up to the last moment. He had not been brought out of his sins till then. What was it that delivered him? The hearing of faith, the believing in that Blessed One who was dying beside him. No doubt there must have been a lighting up of every atom of the revealed Word of God in his soul. Messiah he had heard of before only as in Scripture. But when he put the person of Him who was dying along with the Word of God, when the Holy Ghost connected the two, when there was a spark, as it were, put to the coal — what a change! This is what is needed. Faith does bring in Christ, and that is what the faith of God's elect has always done. The Old Testament saint had Christ before him as truly, though not so fully, as we have. Abel rested in Christ, as did Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the rest of the Patriarchs. Did not Abraham rejoice to see His day and was glad, as the Lord Himself tells us? And so with all the other Old Testament saints. You may depend upon it that this is a universal truth, and that no soul will be in heaven along with Christ that has not seen Christ by faith. But now that He is come, and now that He has done the infinite will of God His Father on the cross, there is a tendency to rest upon the work without the Person, and the consequence of this is that you deprive the Word of half its value at the least. You deprive it of all that gives force and fulness to it if you separate the person for a moment from the work; which is just the tendency of some teachers about the matter.

Do not suppose I am pleading for any looseness of dogmatic teaching. On the contrary. Perhaps one may be a greater stickler for orthodoxy than many persons who think themselves more orthodox. Assuredly I am pleading for carefulness about the great foundations of

the church of God, and I thank God that these have been maintained. Even in the Romish Church it is one's comfort to think that after all they have the doctrine of the Trinity — that truth which never can be touched for a moment without danger — and that they believe in the reality of the Deity and of the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are other views that tend to destroy the force even of these truths. I mean the exalting of other beings; the multiplying of mediators, and the bringing in of the sacrifice of the Mass, to the destruction of the power of the one sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

I return to the great truth before insisted on, that is, how essential it is that the person of Christ be a prominent point in the Christian hope, as in all other truths. Just as for our souls, it is not merely a salvation, but a Saviour. "Believe" not in the blood, not in the work, not in the cross — that is not the message of the apostle Paul to the enquiring jailor — "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." That Blessed Person brings in His blood, brings in His work, brings in His death and resurrection; but if I merely put forward the work, I may dwell simply upon the fact and not upon the person. But there is another effect of it too. A person draws out my affections towards him. Christ draws me to His feet to worship Him. The faith of a man is small if it does not produce a worshipping spirit.

Just so as to the coming of our Lord Jesus. It is not my going to Him. It is not your going, or any other person's going, or all the persons in the world going, divided as they are in place and in circumstance. Such is not our hope. Our hope is one; not this split up and quite diversified hope. Our hope is bound up with Himself coming for us. If you are the children of God, do not

suppose that I mean that you lose nothing meanwhile if this is not your hope. I have no sympathy with the modern attempt to revive the old patristic notion that the believer in dying goes into some prison or safe-keeping where he is until the morning of the resurrection. You may ask, Who teaches such nonsense as that? Very respectable persons indeed. Perhaps you are not so much used to it on the north side of the Border; but I hear a great deal too much of it in the south, and it is not confined to mere objectors, but, I am sorry to say, even in some Christian societies this obnoxious denial of the fruit of redemption is taught. For what does it all turn upon? That it is essential to your enjoying the true hope that your soul be founded upon the truth of the first coming of the Lord Jesus. Have you entered into that which Christ has brought near? Do you know yourselves to be whiter than the snow, in the sight of God? That is what the blood of Jesus accomplishes. It is not merely a temporary cleansing. This was what the Jew got. The Jew had cleansing of the flesh, but it was just as long as the particular atonement for the sin lasted. Thus there was a frequent renewal, a constant repetition, just because the whole thing was imperfect. The perfect work of our Lord Jesus is contrasted with that, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The whole point there is the many sacrifices of the Jews because of their imperfection — the one sacrifice in its abiding perfection and in its efficacy for you, for me, and for all who are believers in Him.

It is of importance that you should enter into this view of the subject, and I shall tell you why. How can you glorify God and His Christ if you do not know that all is clear between yourself and God, and clear for ever? You may

tell me of the danger, and I admit it. There is nothing that the Wicked One will not pollute — nothing he may not turn to licence, unless the Christian uses in faith the guards that the Word of God supplies. But nothing can atone for enfeebling the truth. Is it the truth that by one offering Christ has perfected for ever them that are sanctified? Then make that truth your own. But do not fall into the Methodistic, or Quaker, or Pearsall-Smith idea of sanctification — all of which are substantially the same. The true Scriptural meaning of sanctification is that you are set apart to God. It is not at all a question of whether there is no evil in your flesh, for there is a great deal. Why, that is all fallen nature is made of. But yet you are sanctified. Sanctification has nothing whatever to do with the extinction of evil in the flesh. That idea, begun with Pelagius, revived by Thomas à Kempis, handed down through Jeremy Taylor, the French and Dutch mystics, W. Law and John Wesley, has passed into other communions where they have no notion whence it came.

Beloved friends, the old doctrine you ought not to have forgotten in Scotland, and I trust you have not, and I do not mean to say you have, but, still, I know it is forgotten in a great many places — namely, that the believer has two natures and not one. All teaching that sets forth the nature improved is false. The old man in the saint is always bad. While we are living men here below, the will of the flesh is opposed to God: there is that which God does not improve, and which does not in the least degree admit of improvement. Our old man is not extinguished, but crucified. “Let not sin, therefore, reign over you.” It is not gone, but the allowing it to reign over you is exhorted against. It is like a wild beast which you are to keep under lock and key; but the wild

beast does not become tame by merely locking it up. And the overlooking of that point quite accounts for a Christian falling into what is wrong. He sins when he is careless or off his guard. There is in the believer on the one hand, that old nature of the flesh which is always prone to evil; and on the other the new man, or the new nature — that which loves God and His will; and it is in virtue of this that the man is said to be sanctified. He has got a nature he never had before. He is set apart to God, and, being brought by faith under the power of Christ's work, he is said to be washed, sanctified, justified. Don't you allow the idea that justification is in the wrong place there. Nothing of the sort. God does not make mistakes in that way, and, depend upon it, the apostle Paul knew quite as well as you or I what he was writing. There are no mistakes in Scripture; for this is what God has written. "Washed, sanctified, justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God."

You may ask, what has that to do with our hope? It has this to do with it, that you will never fully get the true hope until your heart is resting simply on Christ alone. If you are not submitting to what the apostle calls "the righteousness of God," in His redemptive work, you will shrink from Christ's coming, and want to put it off as long as you can. You are afraid of Christ then, and regard Him as a judge. I quite admit He is judge of all men as such. He will judge the world. But to say that He is judge to His body, the church, is all wrong. Such is not His relationship to the church at all. He is the church's Bridegroom. Do you think, when a woman is to be married to a man, that she could look upon him as a judge? Even though he were a judge officially, he would

only be a judge to others and not to her — a judge to prisoners, but not to his wife. What confusion of thought! And yet it is confusion made by highly respectable persons in all ages. Hence I wish to press this upon you, that the source of difficulty and doubt about our hope is the failing to grasp the full truth about what Christ has already accomplished for us. Therefore, the first requirement of every soul is to search and see what the Bible says on that head. Are you set free (Rom. 8:2)? It is not enough that you should be merely converted or quickened. This, of course, every believer must be. But you will find a great many truly converted persons who are not really at ease. They are not quite at liberty of heart. They have got their anxieties in their relationship to God. When they are in that condition, how can you expect them to welcome the Lord Jesus? Clearly the reality of waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ has never taken possession of them.

I remember a celebrated author, a servant of Christ, who wrote the biggest modern work upon the Book of Revelation. I once had some correspondence with him on this subject, wherein he conveyed — “If I could think of the Lord possibly coming tomorrow, I should be much afraid and agitated!” This showed, surely, that his heart was not resting, as a Christian man is entitled to do, on the perfect love of Christ his Saviour. You can readily understand the expectant bride waiting to be married to her future husband, and you might say that she was agitated. There might be no little excitement, one could understand; but, surely, when there was true and confiding love between the two, it would not savour of alarm. It would not be the agitation of fear. Now, that is exactly what my departed friend acknowledged. And

what did it betray? Very likely what is at work among some here, a want of conscious liberty of heart, because of everything being clear between the conscience and God. And the source of that bondage of fear is the want of simplicity of subjection to what God tells us in His Word that He has found in the blood of Christ for us. The death of the Lord Jesus is of perfect and everlasting efficiency, and it ought to be a point of honour, if I may so say, that believers never should allow anything to overcome their resting in assurance on Him.

May a person, then, not be overcome? Yes, But treat it as a sin; do not nurse doubt; do not allow it to master you. Treat it as evil — not because you do not deserve to be troubled, but because God does not deserve to be doubted. That is the point. When the Son of God has wrought a perfect work in glorifying God about sin, it is a disgrace to Him as well as to me if I allow anything to cloud confidence in His love. “Be strong,” says the apostle Paul to Timothy, “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” This is beautifully shown in the case we have already referred to — namely, the robber on the cross, the penitent and believing one. It is very difficult, especially amongst those who reason a great deal, constantly to maintain an unclouded sight of Christ; and I have observed that much controversy on religious questions has a very injurious effect in that way too. No man ought ever to read controversies unless his duty compels him to do so. Don’t read them for the purpose merely of knowing all the great questions and the great answers that have been made in this world. There is a far more blessed thing. Acquaint yourselves with God Himself. Acquaint yourselves with Christ. Grow in grace and the knowledge of Him; and the effect of this will be

that all objections of Satan will fall before Christ, and your soul will be kept in the unclouded favour of the God of love.

Where this is the case, the waiting for Christ is simple and certain. He that rests upon Christ only and His redemption, waits for Christ alone. There will be many other elements. Sweet and blessed to think that we shall be with all the redeemed; that we shall know them as they will know us, and that there will be the joy of life and the joy of companionship. Not merely the blessed fellowship of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, amid all the delights and songs of heaven — we shall have every kind of joy. Not a single element of holy joy shall be wanting in the heavenlies. All these things, we know, we shall have by the grace of God; but there will ever be one commanding object, and that object is Christ.

Therefore now we may come back to Christ Himself. And look how the truth binds these together. The moment He comes, every saint that has ever been, rises to meet Him. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, from every land and of every tongue, from every age and people at once not a few selected ones, but all the saints shall rise and meet their Lord. Banish from your minds those ideas that are found rising up again to pollute the air for God’s children — that it is only those who know more than their fellows that shall be caught up, and that other Christians shall be left to pay the penalty of their want of intelligence at this time. Where do they get that? There is one black spot upon all these theories, and naturally, that the people who preach that a selected class shall be caught up to meet the Lord always have the misfortune to mean themselves. If I came to tell you

that none but my co-religionists, as they are sometimes called, although I entirely repudiate that expression, desiring no religion but Christ — but if I came saying to you that only those who share my views, whatever they be, on this or any other matter, are the favoured few that are to be caught up to meet the Lord Jesus, you might well hiss me out of your town, as I should deserve to be rejected as a false teacher, at least as one merely crying up a party. No, the saints of God shall all share it. It is not merely what strictly is the church of God — not merely those who are indwelt by the Holy Ghost, and have been since the day of Pentecost — but all saints that have ever been in this world, that will answer to the call of the Lord Jesus.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout. Did you ever learn that this word “shout” only occurs this once in the New Testament? There are words for shouting found elsewhere, but this word is quite peculiar. What is the peculiarity? The word thus employed is the technical word for an admiral’s call to his seamen, or a general’s to his soldiers. It is, to put it more broadly, any special call of command to those who were in special relationship to him that commanded them. And thus you see the bearing of the word on this great topic. It is not a call to the world — it is not a call to everybody. The gospel is that, and thank God for it; but this shout is only for those who know His voice, who have heard Him already — those who are familiar with His love, those who are His own, those who have learned to obey — those, therefore, that know that it is the great Captain of Salvation who is calling from on high, who is calling His own to be with Him on high. The word “shout” has nothing to do with the question of

loudness, any more than it has to do with universality — the very reverse, it rather excludes it. It is exactly what would not be used by even a scholarly man in a vague general way — how much less by an inspired apostle. “The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout” — it is a word of command; it is an assembling call — “with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God.” All these, you see, are entirely unconnected with the world. They have to do with God’s own people, for “the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

There is another point I should like to say a word upon in connection with it, because it helps to make plain a saying of Christ. In the fourteenth chapter of John there is a very beautiful setting forth of this blessed hope. “Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me.” At first it sounds very peculiar that the Lord should here tell believing disciples to believe in Him. I do not think it means that they were merely to increase their former faith. i.e., believe in God, believe also in me.” I take it that the force is this: You believe in God though you have not seen Him; believe in Me, who am going to become invisible to you. I, who have been your visible Master, your Teacher in your midst, am going to leave the world. I am going, therefore, to enter a condition of invisibility as far as you are concerned, because I shall be no longer on earth, but in heaven. This follows most simply and naturally from the words of the next verse — “In my Father’s house are many mansions.” It is not that the Lord was going to have done with His body; He never will do that to all eternity.

In that sense, therefore, it will never be a question of absolute invisibility, but only relative — to those disciples certainly so. And this is necessary for Christianity. If I were asked to give in very few words one specific difference between Christianity and Judaism, I would say that Judaism was a religion of sight; Christianity of faith. We walk not by sight, but by faith. Here then, now, to test the truth of it all, the Lord enters that condition, but not by becoming a spirit. The Lord is not a spirit; He has a spiritual body. An angel is a spirit; but the Lord Jesus is not. “A spirit hath not flesh and blood.” We must not at all allow such a notion as that the Lord Jesus, in His risen condition, has not flesh and bones — of course He has. He has no longer a life in the blood, because this is a life in connection with earth, a life which lives by food, air, etc.

The Lord is capable of taking food. He partook of a piece of honeycomb and a fish; but this was not because He required them, but because they required to learn that He was truly risen from the dead. His, we know, is a spiritual body glorified in heaven. And so shall we be; but the Lord here speaks of our faith meanwhile. “Ye believe in God, believe also in me.” Although He had taken a body, and although He was to take that body after the resurrection, still He would be invisible by going to heaven. It is the Christian’s faith contrasted with Jewish sight of the Messiah reigning visibly over the earth. “In my Father’s house are many mansions.” He was going thither. Observe the statement, “there are many mansions,” signifying that there is room for you as well as for Him. Room enough and to spare — room for all the faithful. “If it were not so, I would have told you.”

I would not implant in you a desire that could not be realised. “I go to prepare a place for you.”

Now, the Chiliasts were quite wrong in thinking that heaven would be merely this earth in a renewed condition. Perfectly true that the earth is to be renewed — perfectly false that we are not to be in heaven. Thus to be with Christ in heaven is true, and is the truth which is taught here; and there is where our hope should be resting. Only it is wrong to disconnect heaven then from the earth. This will be the peculiarity of the kingdom, that it will not be as now — the heavens separated from the earth by the sin of man, but heaven and earth both put under the Lord Jesus Christ, the glorified Son of God, the Head of both heaven and earth. Those who now believe in Him, those who have believed in Him from the beginning — we shall all be with Him. “In my Father’s house are many mansions… I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again — (not you will come to me, but) — I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.”

Death is never the hope of the Christian. There is the hope of the resurrection of the body; but the turning-point is Christ’s coming. When the Lord takes the rule, we shall share along with Him. When the Lord comes in judgment to the world, we shall follow Him out of heaven, but we shall always be with Him — “For ever with the Lord.” There is our proper place. Where He has now gone — where He is now in the presence of the Father — there we shall be. How simple! Would not a father love to have his children near him? So we shall be. But is there not One above all nearest to the Father? It is He, the Son of God, and He will introduce us there

— the fruit of His infinite work, and the objects of His Father's love, even as He Himself is.

Now that is the hope of the Christian, the coming of the Lord Jesus — that, and not changes on the earth. There is to be great glory to God, and, let me tell you, there are to be evil and judgments first. I quite admit that truth will surely prevail in the end; but "the end!" that is a serious word. And, further, I quite admit that the Lord is to bless the world. There will be the power of the Holy Ghost, and on the ground of Christ's redemptive work all the earth will be blessed. But, still, it will be the reign of Jesus. How infinitely more blessed that will be than if we could do it ourselves I As the apostle says — "Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." He would not like anything that detracted from the Lord Jesus. And is it not most suitable and worthy that He who was crucified should be exalted? that He who was rejected should be glorified in this very scene of His shame and suffering? This is our hope, and surely it is one not to make the Christian ashamed, although it may well shame those unbelieving believers who put proud aspiring man in the place of Christ. Amen.

W. K.

The Coming and the Day of the Lord - 2 Thessalonians 2

(Section 2 of Three Prophetic Gems.)

Introduction And Background

The Jewish, Christian and Gentile portions have already been shown in the Lord's prophecy on Olivet. Let us now see what the Word of God reveals as to those (not born of God) who may bear the Christian name for the present, but will abandon it. No doubt “the world” comprises more than those who outwardly profess the Lord's name. It also embraces all the nations that are heathen, besides Israel. Scripture is not silent about any of these, and the light of God is as bright and sure on the future as on the past.

This is an important principle to hold fast in reading the written word. People are apt to judge of God by themselves. Since to speak with certainty of the future is impossible for us, man imagines that when God speaks about it, it also must be somewhat uncertain. This is the principle of infidelity. What difference does it make to God whether He is speaking about the past, the present or the future? He assuredly does not “think” in the sense of having to reflect, nor does He merely give an opinion. He knows all things. The only real question can be whether God communicates what He knows, or how far He has been pleased to do so. The prophetic word professes to do this! If God has communicated His mind about the future, as the Scriptures openly assert, it is simply faith to accept all. The moment our faith rests upon His Word, the light shines. What seemed confusion

when we did not believe, turns to order when we do. The light was really there in Christ. It was our unbelief that caused the dimness and confusion.

The Word of God is the perfect revelation of His mind, no matter of what He spoke, or when, and God has been pleased to speak about the future. It is the special mark of His confidence. He told Abraham what He was going to do, what concerned not merely himself but others, even the cities of the plain. Abraham had no direct relation with those cities, though Lot had; yet not Lot but Abraham was told of the imminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot only learned it just in time to be saved, so as by fire. But Abraham knew it in peace beforehand and interceded with God for righteous Lot. Our portion ought to be that of Abraham rather than of Lot. Yet there are those of the future who will be saved just in time to escape destruction. They will be in the sphere of judgment and will pass through it in a measure, but will nevertheless be preserved. The mass will be destroyed for their lawless evil, along with others who are unbelieving: “remember Lot's wife.” But a remnant will be delivered, as the angels rescued Lot and his daughters. Theirs, however, will not be the happier portion: it is for those on high.

God has provided better things for us in every respect. He has given us the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. Accordingly says Paul, writing to the Corinthians, “We have the mind of Christ,” the intelligence of Christ, the capacity of spiritual understanding. Of course, not even the apostles had the same measure as the Lord who had and was Himself absolutely the wisdom of God. We have nothing except in and by Him, and hence only in dependence on Him. However, we do not have only the

mere mind of man, but of Christ, as Christians having the Holy Spirit.

The intelligence of Christ is given. This shows why what was true in principle of Abraham is distinctly and characteristically true of the Christian, for it could not said, in the full force of the term, that Abraham or any Old Testament saint had the mind of Christ. The Holy Spirit was not yet come, for Jesus was not yet glorified. Now that the Lord Jesus has accomplished redemption and gone up on high, He has sent down the Holy Spirit to dwell in His saints, to make them the temple of God. Even the body of each believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit, just as His own body was: He on earth having His body perfectly holy and ever fit for the Spirit without redemption; we only in virtue of His blood. Hence never till the blood of Christ was shed could any saint here below become the temple of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was the living temple of God; we are only so because our sin is judged in His cross and our guilt blotted out by His blood. Therefore the Spirit of God comes down to dwell in us, putting honor on Christ Jesus for the redemption that is in Him. Because of this we Christians receive a divine power by the Spirit opening (in our measure) into all that God communicates.

This, though a digression, is very important to the subject which we are examining. Few things more indicate divine intelligence than profiting by the communication of the future. The Old Testament makes, in the main, this challenge to the false gods, a challenge which could only silence them, even if they had pretended ever so loudly before to give out oracles. As long as it was merely a question of baffling inquirers, they might deceive by equivocal answers, but Isaiah in

the most severe style shows their utter impotence to disclose the future. Now, a large part of the Old Testament consists of revelations of the future, not only of what was future then, but of what is future still. Even the historical part of Genesis is cast into typical forms of prophetic character, exhibiting throughout the mind of God. So does the intermediate poetical portion in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

The prophets inspired by Jehovah expand in blessed terms on the bright future that yet awaits the world Isaiah depicts the day of Jehovah when all that now obstructs the light of glory shall be removed, when all that thwarts the honor of the only true God shall fall, when Satan must lose his delusive power, when the nations of the earth, long groaning under oppression, shall be set free, and when the Jews (who ought to have been the leaders of all that is good and true) shall be delivered from unbelief's most withering thraldom and rise forever to the place that God's promise assigns them as the head of the nations then blessed, the priests of the world. They, converted and restored to Canaan, are destined to fill the foremost place when the earth itself is raised out of its long degradation. Jehovah has spoken it and His hand will accomplish all in due time. It is these prospects of the world on which the Old Testament prophets speak at great length and with graphic minuteness.

When the Lord Jesus came, on whom the accomplishment of prophecy depends for the realization of the kingdom of God, He was rejected. He was the King who brought in the kingdom in His person and presented it with final responsibility to Israel. Then in the cross came a mighty change of immense

consequence to the world, when every bright hope seem blasted, when all expectation of glory for Israel was set in a deeper darkness than before. God made use of that moment of fallen hopes for the earth and for the earthly people, and for the nations of the world, for “some better thing.” He made the cross of Christ bring in a completely new state, when Israel vanished for a season. It was a state distinct from that which prophets prepared the minds of men of old to expect, for their great testimony is to Israel restored and repentant under the Messiah reigning over the earth, blessed beyond example, and all creations and the nations, in happy subjection.

The reason for so unexpected a change is simple, and the ground when once taken was plain. The rejected Christ was raised from the dead. Having ascended to heaven, He took His seat there to begin another and heavenly order of blessing. He is seated there until a moment unknown and undisclosed, before which God effects altogether new things. This is Christianity which is therefore essentially of heaven. The prophets did not speak of heaven except incidentally. Prophecy refers to the earth. Although there are here and there allusions to heaven, no prophet and no prophecy gives a detailed opening out of what the Lord Jesus is doing now as Head of the Church at the right hand of God.

It was not the object of prophecy to speak of the Church. Prophecy is a lamp to which those who love the Lord do well to pay attention, for that lamp shines in a dark or squalid place, and the earth for the present is so. Such is the revealed use of prophecy: Christianity recognizes it fully. But there is a brighter light, not the day but daylight, as the apostle says, “Till day dawn and a

daystar arise in your hearts." What does he mean by this? The accomplishment of prophecy? No, but more and better. Till the day of Jehovah comes for the world? No. He speaks of day dawning and a daystar arising in the heart, not of the day arising upon Zion and the world. This would be the accomplishment of prophecy, but he is intimating what the Spirit of God delights to bring into the heart of the Christian now.

The Jewish believer still was encouraged to use and value the prophetic lamp. More, the word of prophecy derived confirmation from what was seen on the holy mountain. Yet there ought to be through the gospel a far clearer light — the light of day, the brightness of heaven, not of the lamp. They as Christians were already to enjoy its effect. But it might now be so with those slow to learn more. Not only were Christians born of God, as all saints are; they were all sons of light and sons of day (1 Thess. 5:5). They thus are exhorted not to sleep, but to watch and be sober, and here to have their heavenly portion made good in their souls. The person of our Lord Jesus is our hope, the daystar — not merely the general light of heavenly dawn, but the daystar arising in the heart. This is the dawn of the proper Christian hope on the new affections. Many, then as now, were lukewarm and came short.

The actual arrival of the day of the Lord is another matter. It will occur in its own time. It was, however, a good thing to hold fast the prophetic lamp until a better light comes. There are far brighter associations into which the Christian is introduced now through Christ Jesus, but prophecy does not speak of them. The prophetic word does not contemplate the arising of the daystar in the heart. There it is the very reverse of

Christ. The daystar of prophecy is rather the title of the Lord's enemy (Lucifer) as seen in Isaiah 14. The daystar that the Christian ought to have arising within is Christ while He is outside the world in heaven, before He shines as Sun of Righteousness upon the earth. By the gospel day dawns, and the daystar or heavenly hope of Christ arises in the heart while the Christian is here, as he enters into Christian privilege by the truth.

In consequence of this present privilege we stand in a wonderful position. Believing in the Lord Jesus, we have a Savior who is already come and has accomplished the redemption of our souls and given us remission of sins. We have eternal life and the knowledge of our absolute cleansing by the blood of Jesus in the sight of God through the Holy Spirit who is given to us. Yet the condition of the world is no better, but far worse. The world has been led on by its prince to reject its only true King, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the Son of God. We are in the secret of it; we know that the Anointed King has been refused, and we enlightened from above are with Him. We can afford to wait for the great day, but meanwhile we have daylight in the gospel before the day comes. The light cannot yet shine on the world, but it can shine in our hearts. So it is evident that we have more than the lamp of prophecy: we have the daylight and a heavenly hope in Christ. We are sons of the light and of the day.

Hence the Christian is to judge what is passing around, through God-inspired communications. According to the Word it belongs to our proper heritage. The Lord reproached the Jewish chiefs because they were unable to discern the signs of the times. We ought to be able not only to read what is before us according to God, but

also to speak of the future with calm confidence because we believe the Word of God. We may humbly concern ourselves with all that God has communicated as having at heart the family interests, for if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. It would be unbecoming for the heirs not to make themselves acquainted with the inheritance. How strange, if Christians indwelt by the Spirit of God, could not understand! For this reason then, if we only knew our own privileges and depended on the Lord for it in living faith, we would be led into an immense field of blessing entirely outside the natural perception of man.

When the Lord was here below, He showed clearly what was to befall the earth. He says, “The field is the world,” and He has told us what will become of the world where people would be Christianized. From the first He has shown us clearly what would be the result and why so. Good seed was sown, but there was an enemy who sowed bad seed. He does not even suggest that the bad seed would be improved. He intimates that the servants were zealous enough to remove the bad effects, but He reproves them. He warns that their effort to correct the evils brought into the field, the attempt to use the name of the Lord for reforming the “Christianized” world, only results in rooting up the good as well as the bad, if not more so.

When that consummation comes, there will be a process of discrimination in judgment. The wheat will be removed on high, the darnel consumed below. Consequently, then will be the harvest, but this implies evil abounding up to the end of the age. Never will there be a time for this age when the preaching of the gospel or discipline can root out the evil sown by Satan from

the beginning under the Christian name. This age will close by divine judgment on the lawless and on all the stumbling-blocks. The new age will be characterized by the Son of man's righteous rule over the earth in power and peace.

Therefore, those who expect the gradual removal of evil in this age are in opposition with the distinct teaching of the Lord Jesus. We are not saying this to repress efforts toward winning and building up souls. It is one thing to work in faith and another to expect the general and true blessing of the world as the result. Granted that this will surely come, but it is reserved for the Son of man. Should the bride of the Lamb be jealous? Such a result is not for the Church, which has been guilty from early days of being dragged down into the snares of the world, into its human activity, its politics, its ease, its honors, its gold and silver, and what not.

If Christendom is now suffering the buffets of the world, the world (once eagerly sought by Christians for its own things) is now turning against those who gave anything except true testimony to Christ and to what a Christian should be. But it will be worse and worse with the world. Ungrateful for whatever of God has been shed around by Christianity, it will turn again and rend her who abuses the name of the Lord for her own selfish and earthly interests. Evil was planted under the pretext of Christ's name, and this evil can never be rooted out until the judgment to be executed at the end of the age. It is presumptuous unbelief to expect or attempt it. The angels dealing judicially are quite distinct from and contrasted with the servants who sow and watch the good seed.

We repeat that the end of the age is not the end of the world. The phrase “end of the world” in Matthew 13:39-40 in the KJV is an unequivocal error. Far from being the end of the world, the next verse proves the contrary. The Lord sends His angels and purges from the field (or world) what is offensive to Him. The lawless are judged, the scandals removed, the bad crop and the bad fish destroyed. In short the living wicked are punished and the righteous shine in the kingdom of their Father. The kingdom of the Son of man is the earthly part of the kingdom of God; the kingdom of the Father is its heavenly part, as the Lord explains. The heavenly things and the earthly things of the kingdom of God (compare John 3:12) will be found then in undiminished brightness and harmony. In the Father's kingdom, according to His own counsels, the glorified saints shine to His own praise. The field or world which had been spoiled by Satan's wiles will be cleared of all its corruptions and their lawless agents. Thus, far from being the end of the world, the harvest which closes this age will be the beginning of the world's going onward in blessing under the displayed kingdom of the Son of Man and Son of God, the Head of the Church which will then be exalted and reigning with Him.

In the present age, Christ is on high and does not appear in glory or reign over the earth. There will follow another age when Christ, instead of being hidden, will be manifested to expel Satan and remove all that contaminates men and dishonors God. This connects itself with the Old Testament prophets. They all refer to the times of restitution of all things, the kingdom of Messiah over the earth, as the apostle preached to the men of Israel in Solomon's porch (Acts 3:19). The

mistake is in applying these things to the Church now. The principle often does apply in the New Testament: no one means to contest this, but there are limits. The fulfillment is another thing.

In the future kingdom both Jews and Gentiles will be blessed. Of this truth the apostle avails himself, pointing to the fact of both enjoying the blessings of grace, and this is sufficient to stop the mouth of the Jew. Thus we find the Old Testament applied in Romans 15:10, “Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.”1 How then could the Jew consistently object? Was it just to fly in the face of their own prophets? Did the Jew not affirm God's blessing on both to be contrary to the Bible? For the Gentiles are certainly blessed no less than the Jew by the gospel, and this the narrow and proud Jew could not endure. Yet the apostle never says that the prophecy is now therefore accomplished to the full or to the letter. The principle is true under the gospel; the fulfillment of the prophecy awaits another age and a different state of things when Christ appears and reigns in visible power and glory.

In the prophecies we find intimations, not merely of the coming blessing for all the earth, but of the Jews treated as a rebellious people, while God is calling out those who were not a people. Take the beginning of Isaiah 65. The Gentiles are there designated as those who had not known Jehovah, while His people Israel are judged as disobedient. Compare again Hosea 1 and Hosea 2 with Romans 9. Thus the Spirit of God gives here and there hints, dim enough once, but now clearly interpreted by Him, which have a partial bearing on the present time. But none of these Old Testament Scriptures discloses to us the heavenly glory of Christ at the right hand of God

as the center of union to saints on earth, and He the Head of one body to the Christians (Jew and Gentile alike). These things compose “the mystery.” None of them is ever developed by the prophets. It was then a secret hid in God.

We have the fact of the Lord sitting at the right hand of God in Psalm 110, but the great use the psalm makes of that fact is to show that He sits there till His enemies are made His footstool. There is not a word about what meanwhile is being done with His friends. The revelation of the counsels and ways of God with His friends now is Christianity. The psalm speaks of His sitting there till judgment is executed on His enemies. It tells us also that Messiah is Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, but it is silent about His present intercession there for the Christian. The psalm dwells plainly on the future executive of judgment when Jehovah sends the rod of Messiah's strength out of Zion.

What the apostle calls the revelation of the mystery is now verified. It is a secret which the Old Testament never brought out, though giving certain intimations that are accomplished, as for instance in calling the Gentiles. Moses told Israel, “The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the works of this law.” But the great central truth of Paul is that the mystery or secret that was of old hid in God concerning Christ and concerning the Church is now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets2 through the Spirit, as in fact it was made known to us by Paul himself.

The character of the Church supposes that God abolishes at present the difference between the Jew and the Gentile, which the promises and the prophecies kept up. The grand fact of earth's future is that the Jew is exalted to the first place and the Gentile blessed, but subordinately. The old superiority of Israel will be maintained then, however blessed the Gentile will be. To deny this is to deny the truth. In the kingdom they each will be recognized and blessed, but in a different position, not as now when both are made one. The future millennial kingdom supposes the reinstatement of Israel in more than former favor, and the nations will rejoice, but in a place secondary to that of Israel.

In the Church of God all this disappears. The Church is heavenly, as Christ is, and according to the nature of things in heaven. On high people are not known by their nationality; on earth they are, and they will be in God's kingdom here. But, the Christian being essentially called on high or upward, all these earthly distinctions for him disappear. Hence there came a new state of things and a fresh testimony, for God has now revealed in the New Testament that which comes in between the first and the second advent of Christ which is as different from the future on the earth as from the past before redemption.

When the Lord comes again, the Old Testament prophecies resume their course. There is the additional confirmation of a small portion of the New Testament which refers to that time, in order to give a combined testimony, and all the more because so great a change had come to pass.

One may now see clearly what has been pointed out already, that the Lord Jesus prepared His disciples from

the first not to expect the world to progress or end in joy and light and blessing. On the contrary, old evils were to go on and new evils begin and take root from early days by the crafty power of Stan, never to be done away with till the end of the age. This then is a great lesson taught in Matthew.

Luke 21 gives a further view of the world's course. It says, “When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.” This distinctly points to the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, when it was invested with armies perhaps more completely than at any point of its eventful history. But not a word is here about “the abomination of desolation” or that “then shall be great tribulation” such as never had been, nor shall be. It only tells us “these be the days of vengeance”: two very different things. Here again we read, “But woe unto those who are with child and to those who give suck in those days, for there shall be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people.” This was fulfilled in what befell the Jews when Titus took the city and “this people” passed into captivity for the second time. “And they shall fall by the edge of the sword and shall be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” So it came to pass. Jerusalem has been for many centuries trodden down by Gentiles. One national power after another was to have possession of the holy city. So it is still: that treading down yet goes on, for seasons allotted to Gentiles are not yet fulfilled.

Much more follows: “There shall be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars, and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, sea roaring and rolling waves,

men ready to expire through fear and expectation of the things coming on the habitable earth; for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken," etc. These scenes did not take place when Titus took Jerusalem. We have had the capture of Jerusalem in verse 20, etc., after which Jerusalem is trodden down and must be till the seasons of Gentiles come to an end. But in the following verse we are transported into the final scenes. "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to come to pass, look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." The earth's destruction is not here intended, but the blessing that comes after the end of the age when God terminates the time of man's wickedness and misery and trouble and suffering. The coming of the Son of man is never coupled with the end of the world in any such sense, but with the close of Satan's misrule and the shining forth of the kingdom of God. For the world there can be no permanent general blessing till the Son of man comes in displayed power and glory to reign over it to God's glory.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2

Now we turn to our primary scripture. The statement of the Spirit of God is most explicit. He beseeches the saints by the hope of Christ's presence, who will gather them together unto Himself, against the unfounded rumor that the day of the Lord, the day of judgment for the living, had actually arrived. The KJV wrongly reads "Christ" instead of "Lord," and "is at hand" instead of "is present." The day of Christ, as in Philippians 1:10 and 2:16 has different associations from the judgment of the living. However, the mistranslation of the verb is far

more important because it falsifies the bearing of the passage, from which even those who correct it find it difficult to recover. The Greek means “is present” and nothing else. The true sense seemed so unintelligible if not incredible, to translators and commentators, that they gave the different meaning of “is at hand” or “imminent.” The same tense in the New Testament imports elsewhere definitely and invariably “present” (Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 3:22; 1 Cor. 7:26; Gal. 1:4 and Heb. 9:9). In all these it unequivocally expresses the then present, repeatedly even in contrast with “at hand” as future, no matter how near.

Here are the two opening verses of 2 Thessalonians 2 according to the best text: “Now we beseech you, brethren, by (or, for the sake of) the presence (or, coming) of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in (or, from) your mind, nor yet troubled, either by Spirit or by word or by letter as though (or, from) us, as that the day of the Lord is present.” In verse 1 there is only one article binding together our gathering and the Lord's presence. The second “by” in the KJV must therefore disappear. Again, in the last clause of verse 2 “Christ” is read only in inferior copies and versions.

There remain the important questions of how to render ὑπὲρ in the first verse and ἐνέστηκεν in the second. As to the first, the connection with a verb of entreaty has not been adequately considered — that connection being the unique one of a motive from joy and hope to counteract a false alarm. As there is no other instance in the New Testament, it is not surprising that the rendering “by” or some equivalent should be

unexampled there. “By” or “for the sake of” suits the sense.

As to the true and only legitimate meaning of ἐνέστηκεν, there ought to be no doubt. It was a common athenian word meaning something actually going on and not merely close at hand. “Present” seems the one and only meaning of the word in the known authors of Greece. There is not a single instance of “imminent”! It does not occur in the Septuagint except in the Apocryphal writings in 1 Esdras 9:6; 1 Maccabes 12:44; and 2 Maccabes 3:17; 12:3 where it can only mean “actually there,” nowhere “imminent.”

The American revisers here cleave to the misconception and render it “is just at hand,” but they cannot point to a single case where any correct Greek writer ever employs the verb in any other tense except “present.”

It is well known that there is a different phrase (ἐγγύς) for “nearness” in the New Testament and in all other writings, and if emphasis were sought, the verb in the perfect was used (ἤγγικε), as also ἐφέστηκε (2 Tim. 4:6). No exact scholar would sanction the laxity of supposing that the apostle confounds the meaning of two kindred words, each of which has its own precise sense: ἐνέστ. “is present” and ἐφέστ. “is close at hand.” On the face of it, the erroneous rendering makes the apostle contradict himself, for in Romans 13:12 he tells the saints that the day [of the Lord] is at hand. How could the misleaders in Thessalonica be charged with error if they had only taught that the day of the Lord is at hand?

The false teachers of Thessalonica fraudulently alleged the apostle himself taught the untruth that the day of

the Lord had actually arrived. This error was filling the saints, not with enthusiasm, joy or excitement, but with panic, especially as inspiration was pretended and the teachers supposedly had a letter from Paul himself. Its effect was agitation and trouble that the dread day was present, not over-wrought warmth about His coming as very near. Thus in every point of view the KJV rendering is a blunder which would set the apostle at war with himself, and also conceive a state among the deceived Thessalonians which disagrees with what is clearly described in the same verse.

Sign Of False Teachers

There is an unquestionable sign of false teachers which is here commended to the notice of all Christians, for we need it in these days and may need it yet more before the Lord comes. Observe that the false teacher ordinarily does one of two things, sometimes both. Either he lulls asleep those who ought to be roused, keeping them entranced in the deadly slumber of fallen nature, or he tries to alarm true believers by endeavoring to shake their confidence in the grace and truth of God, filling their minds with groundless fear. Not possessing peace himself, he is often deceived as well as a deceiver, for he does not know in his own experience the peace and joy in believing. The false teacher either injures the children of God by weakening their confidence in God, or he lulls with opiates those whom God would have to be awakened from their dangerous insensibility. In short, false teachers flatter the world or seek to alarm the true children of God. Very often they cause mischief in both ways.

The truth does exactly the contrary. Its effect is always to rouse people from their state of guilty indifference or their self-confidence, setting before them their fearful danger for eternity. It tells them of a divine Savior and a present salvation. There is also the comforting, establishing and leading on of believers into all their privileges and responsibilities, their proper joys in communion with the Lord and one another, and their growth in the knowledge of His mind and ways for worship and service.

Back To Verse 1 And 2: The Day Of The Lord

The Revisers assume the apostle is entreating the saints in verse 1 regarding what he had just written and was about to teach them more, for which περὶ would be the correct preposition, as we may see in John 17 and elsewhere. But if he besought them, as I am persuaded he did, by their joyful hope of the Lord's coming against the false notion that the day of the Lord with its terrors as actually come, it is no mere question of the sense of ὑπὲρ in general, but of what is required in this context, of which there is no parallel known to me in the New Testament. In other words, what led to the choice of “touching” here was a wrong interpretation of the verse in which the preposition occurs. Had the real difference been seen, all would have agreed, if not in the “by” of the KJV with most translators till of late, in the nearly equivalent “for the sake of” which is its frequent usage.

What were those up to who misled the Thessalonians? They pretended to have the Holy Spirit and word for their cry that the day of the Lord was come. Growing bolder in their impiety they pretended to have a letter from the apostle, affirming that “the day of the Lord is

present.” It is certain from the terms employed that the “letter” alluded to was not the apostle's, for he says “that ye be not soon shaken in your mind or be troubled, neither by spirit nor by word nor by letter as from (or, through) us.” Thus is intimated, not the letter that he had written, but a letter “as by us” — purporting to be from us — with which he had nothing to do. It was a forged letter, not his First Epistle which we have.

The pretended letter was to the effect that the day of the Lord was already there. Now the day of the Lord, according to the Bible, is to be one of trouble and anguish, a day of clouds and darkness for the world. You may read this abundantly in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel and the prophets generally. On what pretext then was the cry raised by the forger? The Thessalonians were suffering great trouble and persecution for the truth's sake. Indeed the apostle had in 1 Thessalonians 3:4-5 expressed his concern lest the tempter might tempt them somehow through the tribulation they were passing through, but he gives no license for calling it the day of the Lord. The false teacher seems to have used the existing fact of much trial to allege that the day of the Lord had actually arrived. In the Old Testament the “day of Jehovah” is repeatedly applied in a partial or incipient sense (Isa. 13, Isa. 19) etc. The saints indeed knew from 1 Thessalonians 5 that it would be a day of fearful trial, everything meanwhile growing worse and worse till the evil would finally be put down by the victorious power of the Lord.

Accordingly the apostle in 2 Thessalonians 1 points to the revelation of the Lord from heaven, with angels of His might, in flaming fire rendering vengeance to those who know not God (the Gentiles) and to those who obey

not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (wicked professed Christians or Jews, etc.), when He shall come [not to take up the saints for the heavenlies, but] to be glorified in His saints and to be wondered at in all who believed… "in that day." Why fear it then?

The Lord Comes For Us First

On this occasion the misleaders had contrived to excite considerable anxiety and trouble as if the day of the Lord had actually come. Not at all, says the apostle: how can you forget the bright hope that the Lord is coming to gather you to Himself?

"We beseech you, brethren, by (or, for the sake of) the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to him, that ye be not soon shaken in your mind nor troubled."

He thus appeals in verse 1 to a known motive of joy and confidence in their hope; and from verse 3 he goes into the prophetic reasons which demonstrate its complete refutation. It is never said that the saints await the day of the Lord to be taken up and meet Him in the air. The coming of the Lord effects their translation before His day as we shall see. They are to be an object of wonder in that day when seen glorified with Him.

Thus "the presence of the Lord" and "his day" represent two connected but different thoughts often confounded by people — the one for the heavenly saints consummating grace, the other executing judgment. There is little reason why they should be confounded because the apostle had already clearly spoken on them both in his First Epistle. In 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 he describes the coming of the Lord, not His day.

“For this we say to you in the Lord's word, that we the living who remain (or, are left) unto the presence of the Lord shall in no wise precede those put to sleep. Because the Lord Himself with call of command, with archangel's voice and with the trump of God, shall descend from heaven; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then (ἔπειτα) we the living who remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in [the] air; and thus we shall ever be with the Lord.”

This was a new revelation, as he implies in opening the subject (v. 15). The day of the Lord was not a new revelation, for there is hardly any great topic more frequent in the Old Testament from Isaiah to Malachi. Even where this phrase may not be employed, it is involved habitually. But in no case did the Old Testament make known what the Thessalonian saints are here taught by the apostle. They are distinct truths.

Hence having finished the statement of the new truth of the coming of the Lord for His saints at the end of 1 Thessalonians 4, the apostle turns to the old truth in the beginning of 1 Thessalonians 5.

“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that ye should be written to.” [What a contrast with the foregoing new revelation!]

“For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. When they may say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall in no wise escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness that the day should overtake you as a thief,” etc.

Is it possible to conceive a sharper distinction? We see on its face what a mighty difference there is between “the coming of the Lord” and “the day of the Lord,” as the apostle describes them. At His coming for us, all saints until then departed, and we the living who remain, are caught up to meet Him in the air. “The day of the Lord” comes later. His presence is to our everlasting joy, our great triumph over death, whereas the day is His unsparing judgment of the living wicked. How astonishing that any saints should lump them in one!

This is confirmed by what was written some time after to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52.

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: we shall not all be put to sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in an eye's twinkling, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

Paul does not call the resurrection “a mystery”* when he wrote of it in this very chapter. It was not a mystery, for the Old Testament had revealed it. The early book of Job tells us of the resurrection of man (Job 14); not only the privileged case of the just in Job 19, but that of “man” who must die and rise, yet not till the heavens be no more — in perfect accord with the two resurrections of Revelation 20. There is no “mystery” in the two resurrections. It was a truth for both just and unjust, which the Jewish adversaries also received, as Paul told them before Felix the governor. But the coming of the Lord to raise the dead saints and to change the living and translate both to Himself, is the fresh word of the

Lord in 1 Thessalonians 4 and the “mystery” of 1 Corinthians 15.

Thus the Lord's coming with His saints was a truth announced by Enoch and again by Zechariah (Zech. 14:5). This thus was not a mystery any more than their resurrection. It is repeated in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 and elsewhere in the New Testament. The “mystery” is in His coming for them as in 1 Corinthians 15:51 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 in order that they might come with Him, as well as for other ends.

One of these objects for the earth which required the rapture to heaven is the divine purpose to prepare a people here below for the Lord at His appearing. After the rapture God will work for a remnant from both Jew and Gentile during the frightful crisis when He fills the earth with His chastening judgments, which culminate in the Lord's personal infliction when He comes to judge and reign. The Psalms and the Prophets shed much light on especially the godly Jewish remnant. He works by His Spirit on their hearts before and during the great tribulation. The Revelation is as plain at the end of the New Testament as the Gospel of Matthew at its beginning, that there is to be a wave of blessing for Jews and Gentiles during that brief and awful time after the Christian witnesses are withdrawn and seen in heaven. Revelation 7 and 14 are distinct testimonies to this, along with the fact that there is no longer a hint of a Church on earth. Rather, a new sight is behold above — the twenty-four crowned and enthroned elders who represent in symbol the saints of the Old and New Testaments in heaven around God and the Lamb. “The things which are” will then be over and “the things

which are about to happen after these” will next be accomplished.

The sealed of Israel's tribes and the countless crowd out of all the nations (Rev. 5-7) are in different ways objects of divine goodness at that time of trouble. They are not joined together in one body as is the Church. They are separately blessed at this preparatory epoch as they will be in the millennial reign when Israel will form the nearest circle on earth. The nations will be blessed richly but will be willing and glad that the firstborn Son of Jehovah should have the first place in honor and dominion here below. What confusion it would make to conceive the Church co-existing with this! Take a Jew converted by the gospel of the kingdom and looking up for Christ's redemption by power. Consider his perplexity if he heard the Church with Jewish and Gentile distinctions removed, praising in the Spirit concerning a redemption by His blood already enjoyed, and for Christ in each the hope of heavenly glory with Himself on high. Which redemption, he would ask, am I to receive and confess? These heavenly glories with Christ the Heir of all things, and this union in one body so opposed to Law, Psalms and Prophets? Or my portion in distinction from the Gentiles and waiting for the Messiah to accomplish, for us the children, the promises to the father and the new covenant to both houses of Israel?

The book of Revelation clears all up since it presents the saints of the heavenly calling on high, and earthly saints, Jewish and Gentile, here below during the tribulation, alike awaiting the Lord's appearing for the glory to be manifested both in heaven and on earth.

The Judgment Seat Of Christ

There is also another reason on the heavenly side which calls for the heavenly saints to be with the Lord above before He and they are manifested in glory. Each of us shall give an account concerning himself to God. We shall therefore all be placed, though in differing times and for opposite ends, before the judgment seat of God (Romans 14). It is to Christ personally that we shall then bow. We must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ that each may receive the things [done] through (in) the body, according to those he did, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5). This will take place for the saint in his glorified state (and what a comfort this will be), but before the Lord comes in His kingdom, for the respective place of each in the kingdom is determined by that manifestation of ourselves to Christ.

The glorified saints are shown perfectly at home above in God's presence from Revelation 4 to 19 during the sad season of earth's greatest darkness and abomination and misery. Only before the “bridals” of the Lamb come do we hear of His wife making herself ready! That judgment seat manifestation to Christ is needful for her! The marriage of the Lamb is followed by His appearing and His saints with Him (Rev. 19). They obviously had been caught up and in the Father's house long before.

Receive Us, Then Reign

There are three applications of the Lord's presence at three separate occasions — to the Christians, to Israel and to the Gentiles. Matthew 24:31 wholly differs in context from Matthew 25:31. The latter is severed from the former by a considerable interval of time. If Israel thus is dealt with before the Gentiles, it is the right

order for the earth. But proof is at least as strong that the Lord's first and highest object is to receive to Himself on high those destined to be with Him where He is in the intimacy of divine love and heavenly glory, as well as to reign over those delivered earthly Jews and saved Gentiles.

The heavenly saints take precedence and are caught up to be with the Lord for the Father's house before these Jews or Gentiles on earth are converted. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so is Christ's taking His bride above. Christ's rejection by Jews and Gentiles on the earth gave occasion to God's highly exalting Him above after a new sort.

Those who identify the Lord's presence here with Matthew 24 and kindred Scriptures would do well to weigh what has satisfied their brethren that they refer to distinct acts and differ in nature, each with its own personal object — the latter for the earth and the former for heaven. There will be points of resemblance between them because their respective objects are to be blessed in a new and wondrous way above and below. But our blessing will be by a removal on high characterized only by grace; theirs by a judgment that overwhelms their enemies below.

In 1 Thessalonians 4 we see only the risen and changed saints who are to be with Him then and always. These are those who hear His call and, seeing Him as He is, are henceforth like Him, their bodies of humiliation transformed into conformity to His body of glory. In Matthew 24 it is a question of “flesh” being saved through the preceding perils, without a hint of resurrection or change when they see the appearing of

the Son of man. Then shall all the tribes of the land mourn, which is foreign to 1 Thessalonians 4. “They shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory,” but nobody is said to be changed by it. Rather, after this He is said to send His angels with a great sound of trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect (of Israel) from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other. This description widely differs from the heavenly saints changed and caught up to Him on high, as in 1 Corinthians 15, Philippians 3, and 1 Thessalonians 4.

Colossians 3:3-4 goes farther and positively excludes Matthew 24 from the possibility of being classed with these Scriptures. It states that there is no appearance of the Lord to all mankind when He comes for His joint-heirs, till they are already changed and manifested with Him. “Whenever Christ our life shall be manifested, then shall ye also be manifested with Him in glory.” Till then our life is hid with Christ in God. When He appears, we (are not caught up, but) appear with Him in glory.

In 1 Thessalonians 5 the apostle had explained the contrast of “the day” with “the presence” or coming of the Lord for His own. The latter was a new revelation which they had not known before. As to the former, they knew accurately that the day comes as a thief in the night. Whenever men may say Peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them as the throes upon her that is with child, and they shall in no wise escape. The apostle's assurance is clear that this was for the sleeping world, not for sons of light and day as they all were. Hence it was inexcusable for the Thessalonian saints to listen to the fraudulent alarm of their misleaders that the day of sudden destruction had

arrived. Likewise, it is inexcusable for others to confound the joyful meeting of the Savior and the saved above, and the terrible destruction on the men of the world. It is this confusion that underlies the mis-rendering of ὑπὲρ in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, and of ἐνέστηκεν in 2 Thessalonians 2:2.

Nearly all teachers take for granted that in the former the apostle alluded to what he was about to teach them. On the contrary, it is an appeal to the comforting hope of the Lord's coming and their gathering together unto Him, as a motive for rejecting the false teaching about His day. Further, from verse 3 he shows the prophetic grounds why that day, not His coming, could not arrive till the evils were fully out in the open which then were to be judged.

It is urged by some that the saints only go up into the air to meet the Lord there, and immediately come down with Him. Where is their proof? They may use Matthew 24:31, but this verse clearly applies to the gathering of the elect of Israel after the Son of man is seen coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. In this connection there is no hint of the resurrection or of the translation above.

Colossians 3:4 is plain and conclusive that the words of Matthew do not and cannot legitimately apply to the risen saints. The apostle Paul clearly states that “when Christ our life shall be manifested, then shall ye also (not be caught up, but) be manifested with Him in glory.” Matthew 24:31 thus cannot refer to the glorified ones spoken of by Paul because this Gospel considers elect Israelites gathered from all parts of the earth to the Son of man after His manifestation: Paul considers

Christians manifested along with Christ in glory when He who is now hidden is revealed. Colossians excludes all question of Israel here, and considers only the saints changed into the likeness of Christ's glory: the context of Matthew 24 is occupied with the future saints of the chosen people on the earth and has nothing to do with the risen believers for their rapture or their manifestation with Christ. The earthly people are in view, and the Son of man coming to judge and establish His kingdom here below.

Further, in the latter half of Revelation 19 we have the beginning of the day of the Lord (or of the presence of the Son of man). It is the prophetic description of what the apostle briefly sketched in 2 Thessalonians 8 when the Lord Jesus shall destroy the lawless one with the breath of His mouth and shall annul Him by the appearing of His coming. Here we are not told of the saints being caught up to meet the Lord in the air, but of the armies in heaven following the Lord when He emerges to judge and make war in righteousness. Those armies are saintly and not angelic (though angels also are present then). This is clear, among other proofs of special association with Christ, from their garb of “white pure byss”* just previously interpreted as “the righteousnesses of the saints.” The glorified saints therefore follow the Warrior-King out of heaven: a truth which already had been implied in Revelation 17:14.

Indeed, the scene just preceding those coming armies is the marriage supper of the Lamb which is in heaven. This proves still more strongly that the saints who form the Bride were already there. When the evidence is traced in Revelation, those saints in a glorified state are symbolically shown to be there from chapters 4 and 5.

Who can think of disembodied spirits being seated on thrones?

The coming or presence (παρουσία) of the Lord is a wider term, embracing the day as well as what is just before the day. It may be qualified by “the Son of man,” that is, of the Lord in a judicial point of view, so as to coalesce with “the day,” and not simply imply His presence, but its display, as in the phrase, “the coming of the Son of man.” Thus His coming applies to His day, but the appearing, manifestation, revelation or day is fixed to the time when He comes with all His saints to set up His kingdom by judgments. The first object is to gather home those He loves. Love always secures the object of affection first. Taking vengeance is not the primary object.

2 Thessalonians 2:3

The coming of the Lord then is closely associated with the gathering of the saints, just as the day of the Lord is clearly associated with the judgment inflicted on His enemies here below. Hence we find here, “Let no man deceive you by any means. For it [will not be] except there come the falling away (or apostasy) first.”

“That day shall not come” in the KJV is an insertion of the translators, marked therefore by italics, though substantially correct. The day was not to come till the apostasy had first arrived — the public abandonment of Christianity throughout Christendom. How men deceive themselves when they think that all goes on to progress and triumph for the gospel or the Church through existing means!

We will have the victory when Christ comes, not before. Scripture reveals a very different and more humbling prospect. “The day” will not come unless the apostasy comes first. The charger of modern infidelity is preparing the way for the apostasy. People are bearing the Christian name, yet giving up all the Christian substance. Leaders still carry on the dead forms while the spirit of real Christendom has fled. This will grow and extend. The outward and public recognition of the truth is being destroyed everywhere on earth. There will soon be no outward homage paid to Christianity. The governments of the world are gradually stripping off all real respect for the Bible as God's revelation, even if they yet keep up a formal connection with Christendom.

It was a most seductive evil when the Christians in Constantine's day accepted an alliance with the world, but it is a totally different and most solemn issue for the world when it casts off all its profession of Christianity. Deep was the Christians' loss when they sought the world's recognition, but what an awful day for the world when it is so tired of the union as to throw off the profession! The consequence will be that the slender tie which attaches people generally to the reading of the Bible or attending service will be broken. Granted that there is no reality, no divine life, no true or acceptable honor paid to the Lord, in carrying on a merely outward profession, but people who “go to church” (as it is called) hear the Word of God and Christ named with honor. When this is no longer recognized, they will give it up as an antiquated prejudice and go to shoot, fish, ride or drink on His day. They will occupy themselves in reading anything but the Bible. The most rapid moral decay will ensue. Not so with the elect of God. As the

evil progresses, the real saints will become more evident. They will by the Holy Spirit rest only on the Word of God and such testimony of Jesus as is then rendered, but unbelievers will be engulfed in the apostasy.

This is what is before the world as its doom: the written Word says so. People prefer to look for a pleasant prospect because they dislike and dread the divine warning. But this unbelief only hastens the evil day.

First Thessalonians was the first written by the apostle; the second epistle was written shortly after. Thus, from the beginning of revealed Christianity, from the first communications of the Spirit of God to the churches, such is the solemn warning. Those who profess the gospel will abandon it before the end comes, for that day will not come “except there come the falling away first.” It is not merely a falling away here and a falling away there, but the falling away, the apostasy in the fullest sense.

2 Thessalonians 2:4

Further, “that man of sin will be revealed, the son of perdition.” There was once a man of righteousness, the Savior, but He was rejected. There will be a man of sin, the son of perdition, “who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped.”

We are aware that many apply this to the Pope of Rome. Although we regard his system as a frightful delusion, even Babylon, how can people believe that “the apostasy” has arrived yet. No, the apostasy will be the result of despising the gospel, of trifling with the truth, of keeping up forms that are unreal and then rejecting

them and all divine revelation in cold, proud, reckless and definite unbelief.

The apostasy will occur as far as Christendom extends. Wherever the gospel has been preached, or at any rate the Lord professed, the apostasy will be the issue. It does not mean the end of the Jews or of the heathen. The apostle is here speaking of that broad scene wherein the Lord's name has been professed. Christendom has not yet abandoned openly and avowedly the New Testament as a falsehood, and the Savior as an impostor. It is surely coming for Protestants as well as Papists, and all the rest. The day of the Lord cannot come till all is fully out. “Because [it will not be] except the falling away shall have first come, and the man of sin been revealed.”

The mystery of lawlessness still is at work (v. 7), which was working when the apostle wrote: so early had the principle of utter ruin entered. There is piety in all orthodox sects and even in Popery, where in spite of its corruption and idolatry, the fundamental truths of the Trinity and even of the atonement are owned more than in some Protestant sects. The present mixed state of truth and error is not what is here meant by the apostasy, any more than the Gnostic departure of “some” from the faith referred to in 1 Timothy 4:1-3. It is a general, complete and open departure.

While we abhor the Papist system, the chapter before us with others, speak of a still more awful revolt from the gospel, the Church, the Christ, the Trinity and of God's revelation as a whole before the end comes, or even before the revelation of the lawless one, whom the Lord

Jesus is to destroy, personally appearing for this purpose as well as for other blessed objects.

The climax is the lawless one who “exalts himself.” Jesus humbled Himself and only exalted God, Himself God but become man, the Man of righteousness. Here is a man, “the man of sin,” pre-eminently the opposer and self-exalter against all that is called God or object of reverence. He is the personal adversary of the Lord Jesus. As the Lord said to the Jews, they would not have Him who came in His Father's name, so they will receive him who comes in his own name (John 5:43). At the end of this age he will come. Accordingly, he is found as Satan's winding-up, not merely of apostate Christendom, but also of apostate Judaism. It is man, Jew and professing Christian, in revolt.

The connection with Christendom already has been shown. Now we may briefly touch on Judaism. This personage “opposeth and exalteth himself exceedingly above all that is called God or object of veneration; so that he himself sitteth down in the temple of God, showing forth himself that he is God.” As the true Church began in Jerusalem, the great result of the apostasy will find itself conspicuously in Jerusalem. It was this city which saw Pentecost; so far as the world could discern, it beheld on the earth the Assembly which belongs to heaven. Jerusalem will see the judgment of that which, long a counterfeit, will end in a manifestation of hell — the fruit of the amalgamation of Christendom with Judaism.

2 Thessalonians 2:5-7

The apostle speaks in verse 5 of what he had said of the coming apostasy and of the man of sin with his

blasphemous assumption and defiance of God in His very temple. “Remember ye not that, being yet with you, I told you of these things.” It is after this, in verse 6, that he goes on, “And now ye know that which restraineth, that he may be revealed in his own season.”

He does not say that he had mentioned or explained the restraining power to them, but that they knew that by its action the man of sin could not be revealed till his own season. They may have gathered what that power was from the known place of the Holy Spirit as exercising power for good.

When that evil hour arrives, the powers that be, at least as far as the Roman earth is concerned, will no longer be ordained of God. The dragon will give its emperor its power and his throne and great authority (Rev. 13:3). The ten horns, his satellites, receive authority as kings for the same hour with the Beast (the symbol of that Empire in its last form). They have one mind and give their power to the Beast (Rev. 17:12, 13). Finally, the Beast and False Prophet perish awfully together, as do the kings and their armies. The Roman empire is long gone, but He who restrains is still here. And He will restrain till the moment comes for that very empire (which existed when the apostle wrote and ceased to be as now for so many centuries)* to emerge from the abyss. It is to be ordained of Satan on its revival, to its everlasting destruction.

While the Roman Empire was in power, God owned it, heathen though it was, and the restraint still wrought. But the Empire fell in the fifth century, and the man of sin did not rise. God's providence wrought, and He owned in His providence the Teutonic hordes and the

kingdoms which took the shattered empire's place, as He did the Romans before, and does the powers that be still. The restraining power still works, and will work till the dreaded time when the Church joins her Head for heavenly glory. For a while after that event the Holy Spirit still will work and control, according to the Apocalyptic expression of “the seven Spirits of God sent into all the earth.” It is only in the latter half of the unfulfilled seventieth week of Daniel, the 1260 days of which the Revelation treats, that Satan plays that terrible game on earth when he sets up the Beast and the man of sin sits down in God's temple.

Now if this is the simple and sure truth of Scripture, we can better understand why the apostle was reticent. God may not have revealed to him, as He did through the beloved John, that strange quasi-resurrection of the fallen Roman empire, destined to rise again under Satan's power when the restrainer is gone. Yet it is to receive from the appearing Lord, its doom in the person of its eighth head in the lake of fire. The Spirit of God, as a spirit of government, has restrained all through and will till just before the end of the age. When the dragon is allowed to govern without check for a brief time, He will cease to restrain. To imagine (as some do) that the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with the powers that be since the Papacy is as great an error as to overlook the Satanic reign of terror and blasphemy during its allotted “little while” before the Lord is revealed in flaming fire to destroy it and to bring in His own world-kingdom in power, righteousness and glory.

The truth of the Holy Spirit governmentally restraining may have been known to the Thessalonian saints in a general way, but not written down for wiser and better

reasons than any dread of the Roman government. Daniel had already given the empire's destruction, as foreshown to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2, 34-35, 40-44, and to himself in Daniel 7:7-8, 19-26, as it was yet more fully shown in Revelation 13, 14, 16, 17, 19 after the death of the apostle Paul.

The Thessalonian saints, like others who believe in that unspeakably terrible consummation at the end of the age, knew that it will result from the allowed apparent triumph of the lawless one, the instrument of Satan to the last degree. They knew therefore that God, working by His Spirit as He had always done, and now especially to Christ's glory since Pentecost, alone could hinder that cherished aim of the arch-enemy. The Roman empire while it lasted might be and was an outward hindrance; and when it fell, other governors, ordained of God stood in its way. To have named only the Roman Empire would have been a mistake which divine wisdom avoided. The particular barrier, τὸ κατέχον, might vary, as it did, but ὁ κατέχων the restrainer, abides to use providentially "the powers that be" till the Roman empire rises from the abyss for the final crisis.

Further, being both a power and a person (i.e. spoken of as neuter as well as masculine) the Restrainer can not apply to an empire, but can apply to none so well as to the Spirit of God. He still, to sustain His testimony to Christ and for the sake of the children of God, continues to hinder the final manifestation of Satan's power. However, when the Church is gone up on high, it seems that the Spirit will act not only to convert people, but as a spirit of government (Rev. 5:6) till God allows Satan to do his worst for his short time. The Spirit of God then

will cease to restrain the working of the evil one, who will dare all things against the Lord.

2 Thessalonians 2:8

The Appearing Of His Presence

“And then shall the lawless one be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall destroy with the breath of His mouth and shall annul with the appearing of His coming.”

The Lord Jesus is the appointed destroyer of this fearful “lawless one” who is elsewhere called the antichrist. Even now there are many antichrists, says John, but when the antichrist comes, he will be brought down by the Lord Jesus in person appearing from heaven. The addition of “Jesus” (to the KVJV) is certainly genuine. It gives more definiteness to the expression and thus excludes any mere dealing in providence.

Here recall the first verse. The apostle does not say the day of the Lord or the appearing of His coming, when Christ gathers the saints. “We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto him.” These two wondrous events are so closely associated by one article in the Greek, that the second “by” in the KJV is an injurious intrusion. But, when the destruction of the man of sin is in question, Paul speaks, not of His coming merely, but of the appearing, the epiphany of His coming. If it were a display when the Lord comes to gather His saints, why should “the appearing” of it be expressed in verse 8 only? Why is its “appearing” avoided when He comes (v. 1) to gather together His saints to Himself?

Is it not manifest from the phrase itself that the coming of the Lord does not of itself imply His appearing? How else do you account for the indifference in the wording of verse 8? When His appearing was meant, it was necessary to say so, and this is when He judges. When it is the dealing of His grace in translating us to heaven, His coming or presence is named, but not a word about His appearing. When the lawless one shall be destroyed, it is not merely His presence or coming, but the appearing of it. He could not appear without coming; He might come without being seen beyond a select company, but now we hear of the display of His presence. When He comes to take up His saints, what will the world have to do with it? It was His own love which saved them. They belonged to Him, not to the world. He comes to claim His own. He does not make the world a spectator of His actions before He appears in glory for the destruction of the antichrist.

Where is, or what implies the world here? The apostle is showing how God will bring the departed saints with Christ. The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a call of command κελεύσματι, with archangel's voice, and trump of God. It is exclusively to raise the sleeping saints and change us who remain alive for His presence, when both are caught up together in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Not a word implies that the world hears at that moment; not a word that earth and heaven are shaken. Not only is there total silence as to these bold importations, but we are expressly taught by the same apostle that, “when He shall be manifested, then shall ye also be manifested with Him in glory” (Col. 3:4). We

must therefore have been caught up before the common manifestation of Him and His in the same glory.

We have seen how different it will be when the Son of man comes on the clouds o heaven with power and great glory to gather together His elect of Israel from the four winds. Here the rapture on high is not hinted. It is His presence for the earthly people, and therefore for all on earth to see (Rev. 1:7).

The distinction therefore of 2 Thessalonians 2:1 and 8 (the presence of Christ simply, and the appearing of His presence) is precise, instruction and undeniable. The one is to gather together the saints to Christ above; the other is for Him (and for all His saints thus gathered, to appear with Him) to crush His enemies. It is then that every eye shall see Him, as His appearing concerns every person on earth. Timothy was solemnly charged in the First Epistle to keep the commandment spotless and irreproachable till the Lord's appearing because responsibility always refers to that day. The rapture is grace to all the saints equally caught up to Christ on high. The appearing will manifest the fidelity or the failure of each saint. Hence the apostle still more narrowly charges His appearing and His kingdom on Timothy in preaching the Word and in all his other service. Paul connects the crown of righteousness which the righteous Judge will render “in that day” (not at His presence simply) with His appearing, to those who love it.

The epiphany or appearing of Christ is not secret. The Spirit of God draws a plain and sure distinction between the presence of the Lord to gather His own and the appearing of His presence to destroy the lawless one

and his adherents. If His presence necessarily conveyed appearing, how could the apostle write both 2 Thessalonians 2:1 and 8 in the same context? If he meant us to learn the distinction, how could he have intimated it more exactly?

The world will have bowed down to the antichrist. Gentiles as well as Jews will have accepted him. Just as the blessed Lord Jesus is both the true Messiah and the God of Israel, so this lawless personage, the man of sin, will set himself up to be both Messiah and Jehovah of Israel. Kings, classes, and masses will be led away by the fatal delusion. The same unbelief which rejects the true will cling to the false. It is Satan's woe for the inhabiters of the earth and of the sea — for men under settled government and for those in a revolutionary state. These are the dismal prospects of the world according to the Scriptures. A far different future fills the imagination of men generally. Why wonder at this? How can they truly predict what is to be? No man can discern the future unless by faith he profits from the light of God's prediction and declines going beyond it.

2 Thessalonians 2:9-12

What is particularly awful for that day is the intimation in verse 12 of our chapter, in connection with the lawless one.

“Whose presence is according to the working of Satan in all power and signs and wonders of falsehood, and in all deceit of unrighteousness to those who perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. And for this reason God sendeth them a working (energy) of error, that they should believe the lie, that

they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

Here we see that Satan will work in imitative counteraction of God's power that wrought in Christ. It is no trickery of priests or monks, no winking Madonnas or liquefying blood or profane fire ostensibly of the Holy Spirit. The same terms are here used for Satan's energy in the man of sin, as Peter employed in Acts 2:22 of the Lord Jesus as demonstrated by God to the Jews. On the other hand God will give up people by a judicial blindness to believe the lie of Satan that especially this man of sin is supreme God, so that he even dares to sit down in the sanctuary, showing that he is God. It will be divine retribution: people had rejected the truth: they had no love for it that they might be saved. They imputed the undeniable works of power and wonders and signs of the Lord Jesus to Beelzebub: they ascribe to the only true God those works of Satan by this minion of his, the man of sin. As the Jews were at last given up to blindness for their unbelief, so will Christendom be given up. Jews, professing Christians, etc., will combine to worship the son of perdition, as Jews and Gentiles united to crucify the Lord of glory. The last will be worse than the first. “I am come in My Father's name and ye receive Me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.”

At this very time among the distant and till then heathen nations, there will be a great and true work of God's mercy. Godly Jews, forced to flee from the antichrist in Jerusalem, will be used of God to win a countless throng of Gentiles by preaching the gospel of the kingdom, as we learn by comparing Matthew 24:14 with Matthew

25:31 to the end, also with Revelation 7:9 and Revelation 14:6-7. It is an “everlasting gospel.”

The lawless one here depicted must await the dreaded hour when God sends judicial darkness and when the wetsern powers and the Beast (animated by Satan like the False Prophet) combine against Jehovah and His Anointed. But the Lamb shall overcome them (for He is Lord of lords and King of kings) and those who are with Him are called and chosen and faithful (Rev. 17:14, Rev. 19:14).

God alone knows and can tell the future. But God has revealed it, and we have the responsibility of believing or of being infidel. A man cannot truly believe these things without their leaving a divine impress upon his soul. If you have Christ the hope in your heart, show it in your hand and on your forehead by seeking to stand true to Him whom you believe. The Lord Jesus is coming, but He is to appear also. He is not merely coming to receive His own, when the result will be in a moment, in the twinkling on an eye (1 Cor. 15:52).

The Lord has many ways of taking His own to Himself without death. Suppose the Lord were to cause a tremendous earthquake. The wise men of the world would say that the Christians had been swallowed up in the earthquake. It is easy enough to conceive a way in which the Lord could conceal the matter, but He does not conceal from us, nor will He from men, what He will do to the misleader of the Roman world. He will not conceal His judgment from the world, or even the various forms and times in which it will fall. Then certainly He will be manifest to every eye. Hence we

find that, whenever judgment is in question, manifestation characterizes it.

When the Lord Jesus in His sovereign grace called Saul of Tarsus, his companions were allowed to feel the tokens of some extraordinary action going on, though they knew nothing about it. There were many going to Damascus, yet only one man saw the Lord Jesus. All the rest heard only an inarticulate sound. They did not heart the words, but Saul of Tarsus did. Then, again, we find Philip caught up and carried to another place, but what did the world know of all that? There was a subsequent occasion when the apostle Paul was caught up into the third heaven. But this was so far from being divulged for the sake of the world, that the apostle says only "whether in body or out of the body, I know not: God knoweth." Nothing, then, is easier than for the Lord to conceal or show things partially on these occasions, but He will display them on the grandest scale when the judgment of the world comes, after previously His people.

Service And The Lord's Appearing

There is a bearing on service. Timothy was to keep the injunction, laid on him, spotless, irreproachable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 6:14). There is a pressure of responsibility, and responsibility in Scripture is connected with His appearing, as sovereign grace is connected with His coming and receiving us to Himself for the Father's house. But it is false to conclude that our abiding on earth till Christ's appearing is implied in keeping the apostle's injunction, any more for us than for Timothy. Neither departure to

be with Christ nor being caught up to be with Him at His coming hinders like fidelity on our part or on his.

In 2 Timothy 4:1, 8, responsibility is again stressed, not only for Timothy but for all saints who love His appearing. The verse is as plain as it is solemn and important. “Henceforth is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous Judge will award to me in that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved (and do love) His appearing.” His coming for us would here be quite inappropriate because it would simply imply being caught up to be ever with Him. But His appearing is the day when faithfulness will be revealed publicly, and the work of each will be made manifest. If the work abide the test of that day, each shall receive reward according to his own labor. Besides, even now to love the appearing of the One who will judge every evil thing and set right the world long disordered by the Serpent, is the deepest joy because all will be to His praise whose appearing will alone bring it to pass. Were one filled with earthly care or courting wealth and honor of men, how could one love His appearing who will judge it all and establish His righteous reign? It is indeed a “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13), though it will be much greater to be with the Lord Himself in the Father's house, beholding His glory outside and above the world (John 17:24).

Revelation 17 And 21 Contrasted:

The Harlot And The Bride

In Revelation 17, two evil objects of judgment are set before us; one called the great Harlot, the other the Beast. The unclean one is seen sitting upon many waters

“with whom the kings of the earth,” etc. (vv. 1-6). At first the two are together: the corrupt woman is seated upon a well-known and remarkably characterized Beast — the Beast with seven heads and ten horns. Much may be gathered by comparing verse 1 here with Revelation 21:9-10. “And there came unto me” etc. Is it not plain from the comparison that the one is the counterpart of the other? Babylon, the harlot, is Satan's sad contrast to the bride, the Lamb's wife! The bride of the Lamb is the holy city having the glory of God. Babylon corrupts herself with the kings of the earth, to their corruption also. This explains why she is called “Harlot.” She likewise is the great ruling city of the world, which has her kingdom over the kings.

It is not so with the Church glorified, the body of Christ, the Lamb's wife. “And the nations shall walk by her light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory unto her” (the heavenly city). The bride is said to be “the holy city, Jerusalem,” that comes down out of heaven from God. This, then, is the holy (not the great) city — a known error in the KJV. The fact that the holy city, Jerusalem, is the Church glorified, helps us understand Babylon. What is the religious body which under the shelter of Christ's name, pretends to be the mother of all the churches? Can anyone hesitate? Was there ever a system of such varied idolatry, hypocritical corruption and atrocious cruelty in the Savior's n name.

There can be no reasonable doubt about the meaning of Babylon, but, as if to preclude the possibility, we have several marks. First, the once dominated the Beast as none else ever did, arrayed in all the world's splendour and earth's richest ornaments. Next, she abandoned herself to illicit union with the kings of the earth for

their gifts of patronage. Then, her golden cup was full of abominations, and “the unclean things of her fornications” was beyond all rivalry. Lastly, she is a vindictive claimant, the most unrelenting of persecutors, drunk with the blood of the saints. So clear is her identification that one needs not even to mention her name. Surely the truth must be very evident when it is unnecessary to say who she is to the most unlettered, where the Bible is read.

The Revival Of The Roman Empire

Nor is this all we are told here. The last verse says, “The woman is the great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth.” There is a distinction we may now note. The chapter does not confound the harlot and the woman. It is the woman that is declared to be the symbol of the ruling city. The better history is known, the more it will be felt that Rome is meant. This one city ruled more and longer than any other since the world began. Everybody in the apostle's day would know where this city, built on the seven hills, lay and what was its name.

This city was to become the harlot, and to exercise power over the Roman beast (empire), the Beast of seven heads and of ten horns. At first sight, there is a difficulty here, for the Roman empire has disappeared. It existed and has fallen. How then are we to understand the chapter? The historian tells us that the Roman empire long ago declined and fell. There he stops; he could not lift the veil because he didn't believe in God's revelation. History doesn't explain prophecy, but prophecy explains history. Prophecy is the true and divine key to the prospects of the world. Accordingly, here is the explanation: the Beast that then was, the

Roman Beast, would cease to exist. “The Beast that thou sawest was, and is not.” Its vast power was to perish: the unsaved historian has recorded that fact. But behold in the Word another thing which history could not know! The Roman Beast is to revive! Diabolical power will revive the Roman empire. And those who dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the Beast that was, and is not, and “shall be present” — the true reading and sense. Here we have the clearest intimation that the Roman empire is to be reconstructed, under the most terrible influences for a little, before the age ends and the Lord appears in judgment.

Let us look back for a moment at the history of the world and compare it with the present and the future. In the time of John, the Roman empire ruled the known world. The empire had one governor or chief. Gradually the power began to weaken and wane. First came the division into east and west. Then some time afterwards the Germanic barbarians broke up the Western empire and founded those separate kingdoms of Europe, which, after feudalism, passed into the constitutional monarchies of modern times. Such has been the result of the breaking up of the Roman empire. Here we find the two conditions: the Beast that was, and the Beast that is not. But it “shall ascend out of the abyss (or, bottomless pit.” This will be a new power in the world's history. The worst of powers is better than anarchy; the most grinding tyrannies are safer than no authority at all. But a new state is to rise absolutely without God and under Satan's unhindered agency, drowning men in perdition.

Whatever changes may have occurred in the world's affairs, there has never been a power without the sanction of God, bad as its exercise of authority may have been. The letting loose of the power of Satan has not yet occurred, because there is One who still withholds (2 Thess. 2), but when He withdraws the hindrance, the Beast ascends out of the bottomless pit. Here John speaks symbolically of the Roman empire in its last Satanic uprising to power. In the end of this age Satan will be allowed by God to re-establish that great object of human ambition. Men are even now yearning after an energetic central authority in the West. It is plain fact that the kingdoms of Western Europe have no political coherence. One of their marked features has been that they are constantly in danger of war with each other. They have sought, by what they term “the balance of power” to maintain a measure of mutual understanding, peace and order. But in consequence of this arrangement, no one power has been allowed to get the upper hand.*

At the appointed time the Beast will be reconstituted. There will be unity, one central authority, without extinguishing the separate kingdoms, except that the little horn acquires three. Thus there will be the revived Roman empire with distinct kingdoms. The future state will consist of the imperial headship along with the subordinate kingdoms of the once united western empire. The so-called balance of power then will be required no longer in the West. In the East and North there will be mighty adversaries. One will besiege and the other be besieged. And the day is coming when Satan will deceive the world. God also will accomplish His own purpose of gathering out His saints to Himself.

Then the world will be allowed to have its little moment when Satan has consummated his power on earth. (Rev. 17:12-13)

The state here described never occurred before or since the fall of the Roman empire. Here the principle of national independence will have disappeared. The time will have come for a vast change in the world: a great imperial power will arise, called the Beast. It will not absorb all the nations, but will control and use the separate powers of the West. The Beast is a symbol of strength, but absolutely destitute of reference to God. The western imperial system will have thrown off all owning of God or thought of Him: yea, it will defy Him. Apostasy will have prepared the way. This imperial power will have the direction of the distinctive Roman dominion, the western nationalities of Europe.3 The kings will be flattered with the idea that they each have a separate existence and will. But they are only as the muscles of the strong head who uses and controls them all. That follows their destruction of Babylon? “These shall make war with the Lamb.” What a difference from the blessed reign of peace and righteousness, and from what men dream to be the optimistic future!

The Coming Saints

The saints then come from heaven, being with the Lamb when the conflict arrives (compare Rev. 19:14). Being changed, they are to be forever with the Lord and thus follow Him out of heaven. So, when the final contest arises between the Lord Jesus and Satan (represented by the leader of the West) the Lord is accompanied by His saints. They are here styled as “called and faithful and chosen.” Some have thought these are angels, but

angels are never called “faithful.” Further, they are said to be not merely chosen, but “called.” How could an angel be “called”? Calling is an appeal of grace which comes to one who has gone astray in order to bring him back to God. This is never true of an angel. The gospel is God's calling of fallen and guilty man to give him, through faith and because of redemption, a place with Christ in heaven. Those who believe on Him are here shown to be with Him, and they are “called, and faithful, and chosen.” They have been above from just before Revelation 4.

The Harlot's Fate (Rev. 17)

What about the woman? We hear about her also in verse 15, where we discern her vast quasi-spiritual influence. It is not a national body, but an idolatrous, persecuting, pretentiously religious system, claiming to be the spouse of Christ, but really an unclean harlot that extends her corruption over all the world. Although Rome is her center, she sits upon the many waters — peoples and crowds and nations and tongues. How easily seen who and what she is! There is only one such in Christendom, though she has daughters too.

Further notice (as in verse 16) what a change takes place! Instead of these “horns” or kings of the West being any longer subjected to Babylon, they, with the Beast, turn furiously against her. Would it not be an incredibly strange thing for the Pope to turn against his own church or city? Hence the Pope is not the Beast and has nothing directly to do with destroying Babylon. Rather, the Beast is the symbol of the empire in its last phase, when the Beast from the abyss is thus joined by

the various leaders of the different kingdoms of the West against that impure and most guilty religious system.

Babylon had long intoxicated men, persecuted the saints and dallied with the kings of the earth. Now the turn of the tide comes: Babylon was not of God, but a corrupt idolatrous impostor. Yet, there is nothing of Christ's mind in her destroyers. It is Satan against Satan, and his kingdom shall come to nought. The end of the haughty world-church is come, and soon after comes the end of her destroyers. The Beast and the ten horns _ the whole Western empire — have their one mind in this revolt from the Roman harlot. They strip, eat and burn her, according to the language of the prophecy.

The Beast will be steeped in blasphemy. He and the horns will be given over to the hatred of God, while at the same time they will at last hate the Harlot which had deceived them so long. It is a violent reaction against the vileness of Babylon, but no less a rejection of divine truth.

Do men call it “the Eternal City”? Alas! the Romish priests keep it hidden from their hearts that Babylon, the great city of the West, is doomed to be thrown down and found no more at all. Her smoke is to rise up unto the ages of the ages like Sodom and Gomorrah, when the Lord reigns over the earth and the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.

Summary And Review Of 2 Thessalonians 2

Coming to take vengeance is not the primary object of Christ's leaving heaven. Such though is flagrantly opposed both to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and to 2

Thessalonians 2:1. God's Word proves the importance of distinguishing between “that day” and “the presence of the Lord” which has for its primary object the gathering of His saints to Himself above! Not a hint is breathed in 1 Corinthians 15:56 of vengeance or judgment in any form or degree, but of “a mystery.” Raising the dead saints was not a mystery, but an Old Testament truth. But the apostle adds the new revelation that “we” (Christians) “shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in an eye's twinkling, at the last trumpet, for it shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” 1 Thessalonians 4 says, as an equally new revelation, that after the dead saints rise, we the living who remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and thus we shall be always with the Lord. These verses are the divine expression of grace and of nothing but grace.

Some confound this heavenly gathering together with the wholly different gathering together of the “elect” of Israel in Matthew 24, where not a word implies any catching up to join the Lord. The Jewish elect are scattered to all quarters and thus need to be gathered when the time comes for the Son of man's presence on the earth. They are expressly called His “elect” in Isaiah 65:9, 15, 22, as well as in Matthew 24:31. As (in the same verse) “a great sound of trumpet” summons the elect of Israel, so in that day (Isa. 37:12-13) a great trumpet shall be blown summoning them to worship Jehovah in the holy mount at Jerusalem. The Lord clears and confirms this in Matthew 24.

The context decides whether the elect are of Israel, of the Church or of the Gentiles, for it is true of all three as

the different parts of the Lord's prophecy on Olivet prove. As blessed as the elect of Israel and the Gentiles are to be on earth, it is quite distinct from those caught up to meet the Lord for heavenly glory. For these, all thought of vengeance is excluded. Israel's deliverance is accompanied by the destruction of their enemies. Our rapture to the Lord is entirely and exclusively a question of sovereign grace. Our being thus ever with Him, is our best and brightest privilege. Even His presence for the earth, though necessarily involving vengeance on the wicked, has for its “primary object” the deliverance of the sorely tried and scattered or beleaguered Jews, and the gathering of His elect of Israel.

By not distinguishing things that evidently and profoundly differ, the whole truth on this subject is thrown into confusion. The kingdom of God embraces earthly as well as heavenly things. How sad to misuse the less to darken or deny the greater! There is to be the Father's kingdom where the righteous are to shine as the sun; there is to be the Son of man's kingdom where His earthly people shall be blessed and honored as never before, but for this to occur the sword of divine judgment must clear the way for the Lord's righteous scepter. However, no earthly dealing applies to the heavens or on our behalf before going on high. There, the Lord went up triumphantly and in peace; there and thus at His call shall the heavenly saints be caught up. How can saints overlook the contrast or fight against it!

2 Thessalonians 1 Summarized

Again, let us consider the testimony which 2 Thessalonians 1 renders. Here is the execution and display of the Lord's retributive judgment. The apostle's

aim was to make known the general character of the day before taking up and refuting the false teaching that the day of the Lord had arrived, as in 2 Thessalonians 2. The apostle boasts in them in the churches of God, for their endurance and faith in all their persecutions and tribulations. He calls this a manifest token of God's righteous judgment to the end of their being counted worthy of His kingdom, for the sake of which they also suffer, “if at least it is a righteous thing with God to award tribulation to those who trouble you, and to you who are troubled, rest with us [who were no less fellow-sufferers] at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven.” This of course implies His presence, but it says more. It will be His unveiling after being hidden from view, His heavenly saints being already with Him.

His revelation is described as with angels of His power, in flaming fire taking vengeance on two classes — those who know not God and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, “who are such as shall pay as penalty everlasting destruction from the Lord's face and from the glory of His might, when He shall have come [not to receive His own to Himself, but] to be glorified in His saints and wondered at in all who believed (for our testimony unto you was believed) in that day.”

Such is the character of “that day”: not sovereign grace in associating saints with Himself for heaven and the Father' house, but righteous requital of friends and foes; to the wicked trouble, and repose to saints whom they once troubled. The trouble now would bring vengeance of flaming fire on unbelieving Gentiles and Jews, excluded forever from the Lord's face and from the glory of His might. But at the same time the Lord will have come to be glorified in His saints and to be wondered at

in all who believed. His saints, all who believed, come with Him.

It is not said “in all those who believe”: this is a serious error. A great harvest of blessing would begin on earth after the rapture, not for Israel only, but for all the nations. However, here it is only the saints who come with the Lord in that day. Henceforward it would be for the world to “know” that the Father sent the Son and loved those heavenly ones as He loved Christ (John 17:23), for the world would see Christ and His own in the same displayed glory.

2 Thessalonians 2 Summarized (Verses 1-4)

2 Thessalonians 2:3-12 Gives Us The Awful Introduction Which Brings On That Day Of Judgment And Manifestation, For This Was The Subject, Not The Lord's Coming Which Was A Motive To Cheer. This Display Of Judgment Coalesces With The Narrower Application To Israel Given In Matthew 24. It Is About The Same Time. It Is “Seen” As The Lightning. 1 Thessalonians 5 Pronounces It “Sudden Destruction.” It Will Be Both “Sudden” And “Seen.” But It Completely Differs From 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 And Jude 24, Where We Plainly Are Given The Previous Dealing Of The Lord's Grace (The Rapture), That When He Will Thus Come In Public Judgment Of His Living Enemies, The Heavenly Saints Might Accompany Him In Manifest Rest And Glory Before All Eyes. No One Is Entitled To Imagine Lightning Or Flaming Fire When The Bridegroom Comes For His Bride. Any Such Judicial Terms Or Thoughts Then Are Entirely Absent.

The apostasy means the coming abandonment of all revealed truth. It far exceeds the departure of “some”

“from the faith,” as we read in the earlier verses of 1 Timothy 4. This was realized first in Gnostic folly an d yet more in the systematic departure of Romanism. 2 Timothy 3:1-9 was still far short of the apostasy, when all form of godliness will be discarded with scorn.

The man of sin, the son of perdition, issues from the apostasy and is its crown of shame. He is John's antichrist, though most confound him with the first Beast of Revelation 13, the head of the civil power in defiance of God at that day, whereas he is clearly the quasi-religious (but really most irreligious) Jewish chief who rivals Christ's position, no longer as Priest, but as Prophet and King. Accordingly, he does not have seven horns and seven eyes (the seven Spirits of God), nor even three, but “two horns like a lamb.”

We shouldn't be surprised at the common confusion, for these two Beasts of Revelation 13 equally cast off God and slay His saints and are as closely allied as their great enemies, the final Assyrian or king of the north and Gog, Prince of Rosh, Meschech and Tubal (Ezek. 38-39), who sustains his ally. These two are foes to the emperor of the west, and to the willful king who is to reign in the land of Israel.

Babylon, the corrupt, cruel and idolatrous religious system is expressly called “a mystery,” the loathsome counterpart of Christ's bride, and quite distinct from, though long associated with the Beast or imperial power and its vassals. They at last turn against her in hatred and strip, devour and burn her. It will be no longer the mystery of lawlessness then, of which she, when she sits a queen, is so great a part. The man of sin will next be

revealed, with the Beast and the willing kings, of whom the False Prophet is the director in that day.

The distinctness of this person is confirmed by the words of 2 Thessalonians 2:4, “That opposeth and exalteth himself against (or, above) all that is called God or object of veneration, so that he should himself sit down in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” The lawless one is to be a sinner beyond sinners, the man of sin, and desiring to be God, claiming the honor of the Supreme on earth, in His temple, not in mere earthly things or personal vain glory like Herod in Acts 12. The Christ who was God, became on earth a bondman to glorify His God and Father at all cost. It is a mere imposture for the Pope to dub himself vicar of Christ and head of the church on earth, while acknowledging formally the Lord in heaven. But for this reason he does not fulfill the arrogant self-exaltation of this future adversary who raises himself above all that is called God or object of religious veneration. The temple of God, literally in Jerusalem before the age ends, will be used to support his blasphemous claim. Many of the Jews will be back there in unbelief and will receive him, while a godly remnant flee as the Lord directed.

Though the apostasy is the starting-point, the man of sin revealed is a great advance of an audacious and unbounded impiety under Satan's power, to which the total abandonment of the Christian revelation leaves the door open. Grace scorned,. and Christ the gift of God for sinful men utterly derided, the man of sin follows; man not only without God, but ignoring and spurning all divine restraint. It is atheistic lawlessness, denying sin and wallowing in it without shame or fear. As God was Himself in Christ, the image of Him who abides invisible,

the man of sin will be His personal adversary, exalting himself above all that is called God or object of veneration. “Who is the liar, but he who denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, who denieth the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22). Though beginning as a false Christ, at last he will flout the hope of Israel and the Christian testimony. As the culmination of extreme defiance in claiming to be God supreme he seats himself in the temple of God. Thus apostate Judaism amalgamates in that hour with Christian apostasy, and the first temptation for man to become as God in Eden ends in the lie of man ousting God and showing forth himself to be God in His very temple.

As for the alleged difficulty raised on the sitting of the man of sin in the temple of God on Mount Moriah at the end of the age, it is essential to bear in mind that the apostle here incorporates the testimonies of two prophets who speak of Jewish iniquity at that very time. The first of these, Daniel 11:36-39, explicitly defines the place as the land of Judaea. The second, Isaiah 11:4, is equally clear that he is the “lawless one” destined to his awful doom at the breath of the lips of Jehovah Jesus. Into neither Scripture can one put Christendom.

Haggai also enables us to see that, whatever is the iniquity, destruction or renewal, the house of Jehovah has its unity to the ear of faith. “Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes as nothing? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith Jehovah; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest.... I will fill this house with glory, saith Jehovah of hosts. The silver is mine and the gold is mine, saith Jehovah of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith Jehovah of

hosts” (Haggai 2:3-9). Neither the hostile Antiochus IV, nor the evil patronage of the Idumean Herod nor the blasphemous self-deification of the antichrist, destroys God's title and rights. It is His house throughout, whatever the faithlessness of His people and the seeming triumph of Satan.

Thus, in 2 Thessalonians 2, the apostle predicts a time when the Church will have been gathered on high, the Jew and the once professing church becoming alike apostate, and the man of sin revealed. He is the awful contrast of Jesus' revelation, who, though true God, became the most humbled bondman for our redemption to the glory of God. Thus there is no real difficulty in the lawless one seating himself in the Jewish temple to show off as God. There have been many an d various antichrists, but they all point to one individual at the end who as here written will surpass every person who preceded in impious and audacious setting up to be God in God's own house. Jew and Gentiles will unite to worship him as they did of old to crucify the true King of Israel, yea the true God incarnate.

Verses 6 - 8

From apostolic days the germs were sown and actually there, which were to bear these fatal fruits when the divine restraint (vv. 6-7) should be removed and the season come for their full display. The departure in the churches of Galatia from the sovereign grace of God that saves sinners was an early stage in declension. So was at a later day Satan's effort at Colosse to interpolate philosophy — the principle of Gentiles — and religious ordinance — the principle of Judaism — between Christ

the Head and the members of His body. Both principles struck a death-blow at Christ's union with the Church.

Other evils already noticed in the two Epistles to Timothy contributed their quota, as did that slipping back or away, of which Hebrews 6 and Hebrews 10 treat; which, if yielded to, could only end in apostasy and irremediable ruin. How could it be otherwise, if those who had in any measure enjoyed the effects of the Holy Spirit's presence or who had owned Christ's sacrifice and eternal redemption, renounced that salvation of God's grace and power? All this was the mystery of “lawlessness” at work, which when the apostles were gone, went on to greater ungodliness, with tradition, human and angelic mediators, Mariolatry, transubstantiation, earthly priesthood, the mass, the confessional, relics, Papal assumption and all the other heterodoxies and horrors of Rome.

The end will be still worse. It will be bold and open rebellion against God, as our chapter (2 Thess. 2) intimates. The Restrainer, the Holy Spirit, will be out of the way only when the saints are translated, in whom He dwells individually and collectively. Then the temple of God will be no longer on earth in a spiritual sense. Soon after that, the Holy Spirit ceases to act in ordaining the powers that be. Satan's brief season will then come — the season proper to the revelation of the lawless one, the man of sin. Daniel 11:36-39 is plain and positive proof that his field of operation is “the glorious land.” It is no less plain that the apostle applies that prophecy to the personage he here describes for his blasphemous self-exaltation and self-deification above every object of reverence or worship, real or false. It is also equally plain that he applies Isaiah 11:4 to the Lord's slaying

him with the breath of His mouth, the true reading of verse 4. This again confirms the locality of this wicked person.

Neither text has to do with the Church or professing Christendom, for all that either will be gone to glory or have sunk into the apostasy and the blasphemous worship of man as God. All these texts explain why the daring man of sin will be in the temple of God in Jerusalem. There, the blessed Spirit came down and filled all the confessors of the Lord Jesus. At this time He will be gone, and Satan will have possessed his minion, the antichrist, who will be worshipped as God in the temple by both Jews and Gentiles.

Though it cannot be drawn from the words of the text that the apostle had explained to the Thessalonians the details of the restraint and the restrainer, yet it is not improbable that he told them of these things. What he says is, “And now,” i.e., since things are so, as he had set out in verses 3-4, “ye know that which restraineth as to his (the man of sin's) being revealed in his own season.” God raises a barrier meanwhile. “For the mystery of lawlessness already worketh: only [there is] He who restraineth at present, until He be gone out of the way.” Every saint ought to know who that mighty agent is, now here below to resist the overflow of Satan's power. It may be that the apostle taught those young believers who He is in a general way. Assuredly, they to whom “our gospel” came, not in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, should of themselves be conscious that neither the Church nor any world-power could avail to keep down the frightful energy of Satan if let loose to do his worst, as it will be.

The Church has a chief place as an instrument of that restraint. As long as such a witness of the mystery of godliness bore up, Satan could not force his scheme to efface or trample down the truth and set up his undisputed lie.

The Roman empire too had its authority from God, as the apostle Paul in particular and all the apostles were careful to affirm, whatever its abuse in the hands of its head. Never did it have a more extravagantly wanton head than when the Epistle to the Roman saints laid subjection down as the Christian's duty (Romans 13). But even then Romans 13 is written in terms so broad as to cover all change in the form of government. “Those who be” are set up by God. As long as this authority from God continues, believers are bound to respect and be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience. It was not merely the empire, but any government divinely sanctioned. They knew that Satan could not set up his man of sin as long as there were rulers in God's providence. It is not likely that these young Thessalonian saints were instructed in the possible control of the Spirit, governmentally, for a while after the rapture of the saints, till the last half-week of the seventieth week of Daniel, when all restraint ceases. Then the dragon, in a great rage and knowing his short season, begins the final campaign of this evil age on the earth, given up to his worst (Rev. 12).

There is an element in the restraint far more direct and influential as well of nearer interest. The Spirit of God has in the Church a most special and congenial sphere of loving care and continual action personally in connection with the Father and the Son. To the Church He has imparted unity, constituting believers, Jew or

Greek, the one body of Christ. Also, by His indwelling He makes it God's house or habitation. No factor in the barrier against the antichrist is so decided as this.

The Spirit is here acting in power according to Christ's victory over Satan, not only in life, but in redemption. Who but the Spirit could adequately restrain Satan? He made us of an earthly government and yet more of the Church, yet who but He, working on earth, could be the real restrainer? Of course the Holy Spirit has no such close or intimate relation to any world-power. Yet when the Roman governor talked of having authority to crucify as well as to release, the Lord told him, “Thou hadst no authority against Me except it were given thee from above.” The powers that be are ordained by God, and the Spirit is the agent in their unsuspected control so that, however godless the nations or their rulers may be, the issue is by His determinate counsel and foreknowledge. Both the Jews and their rulers, because in unbelief they didn't know their own Messiah, fulfilled the voices of the prophets by condemning Him.

The Spirit's presence in the Church then, as long as it is here, is the greatest part in that restraint. Satan thus cannot go beyond “the mystery of lawlessness” while the other great mystery of Christ and His Church is being carried on. Hence the man of sin cannot be revealed till his own season shall have come: the Restrainer forbids it. When that heavenly work is completed on earth and the last member of Christ's body is in his place, the Lord will come and receive to Himself not only them but all who were His from the very first. Though the rapture will close that unique association here, the Holy Spirit will still act for a time as He did before Pentecost, both spiritually and governmentally. Both Jews and Gentiles,

not then joined in one body as now, will still be brought to a saving knowledge of the truth, as is plainly taught in the Revelation. This book also discloses the later epoch, when for the first time in the history of man, Satan, no God, ordains the Roman empire in its last and fatal form, and empowers the False Prophet who shall reign as king in the holy land (Dan. 11:36-39). He does his own will, as Christ ever and only did His Father's will.

These are the proofs and marks that the Restrainer then will be gone. Almost all versions unwittingly add to the Word here. The Greek does not say “taken” as might well be of an earthly power that does not vacate, but is forcibly removed (ἀρθῃ). Not so the true Restrainer, who is behind all the visible and varying forms of the restraint. He goes of Himself. He leaves the scene, judicially leaving it open for a while to Satan's abominable pride and mischief. Rather, the Greek says, “till he become out of the way,” which precisely suits the Holy Spirit.

Verses 9 - 11

In verses 9-11 the true force points to an evil not yet accomplished and far more tremendous in the personal antichrist. “Whose presence (or, coming) is according to the energy of Satan in all power and signs and wonders of falsehood, and in all deceit of unrighteousness to those who perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved.” It greatly weakens the truth of that awful fact then allowed to Satan in an exceptional way, to think of the works of that evil man as simply tricks of a deceitful priesthood or “lying wonders” as in the KJV.

As the Lord will manifest His presence in overwhelming power and glory, so will the presence of the lawless one be according to Satan's energy in every form of power and signs and wonders of falsehood to deceive and destroy. The same disbelief which refused the evidence of God's power and truth in Christ will fall under Satan's lie in these powers and prodigies. They are superhuman. Wonders were wrought to a certain point by Pharaoh's magicians. In another way we see surprising effects by natural agents in Job's trials. But here similar language is employed about the man of sin as the apostle Peter used about the Righteous One (Acts 2:22). They will be real miracles to promote falsehood, not pretended ones. The issue will be, not only his own perdition, but the deceiving of all his followers to everlasting ruin because they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved. His lie, the deceit of unrighteousness, will be incompatible with salvation by Christ and the truth. They all perish.

The apostle then gives the moral reason for so stern a judgment. “And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error that they should believe the falsehood, that all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (v. 12). God's sending a working of error is judicial hardening. Satan follows with his deceiving marvels of power to drag down all its followers to perdition. It is divine retribution. They renounced the truth and salvation with it; they loved the lie. They must perish. The elect of that day escape solely by divine grace, as is true of all the elect in any day.

How strikingly portrayed, in contrast with the perdition of that awful time, are the position and privileges of the Thessalonian saints! “So then, brethren, stand, and hold

fast the traditions ye were taught, whether by word or by our letter" (v. 15). As all Scripture was not yet written, they were called to heed what they had been orally taught as well as by the apostolic letter. They were beloved by the Lord, chosen of God unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and faith of the truth, whereto He called them "by our gospel" to obtain our Lord Jesus Christ's glory (vv. 13-14). "Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father who loved us and gave everlasting comfort and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish [them] in every good work and word" (vv. 16-17). The judicial hardening, the energetic action of the enemy and the day of the Lord were to fall exclusively on those who despised Christ and renounced the gospel. Everlasting comfort and good hope through grace, were the portion of those who believed, so present establishing in every good work and word were besought on their behalf.

Opposition To The Rapture: The Parable Of The Wheat Field

We now will look at a Scripture which is used more frequently than any other to oppose the rapture, at least before the day of manifestation. We refer to the parable of the wheat field and the Lord's explanation in Matthew 13. We refer to the only similitude in the chapter that is historical (ὡμοιώθη, "likened," not merely "is like"). The bondmen of Him who sowed the good seed proposed to root up the darnel of the enemy's sowing. He said No: their work is of grace. "The field is the world." It is not the Church where discipline is essential, but the kingdom where they must be left for judgment at the

end, when the kingdom is no longer in patience, but come in power.

“Suffer (permit) both to grow together unto the harvest, and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers (or harvesters), Gather first the darnel and bind it in bundles to burn it, but the wheat bring together into My granary.”

The crop was spoiled. There can be no effective remedy until the end of the age arrives, with its judgment.

The harvesters, unlike the bondmen, are angels. The angels bind in bundles the sons of the evil one at the fit moment for their activity and as their first revealed act. The angels are instruments of divine providence, and at that season they will be employed in a measure, even before the sons of the kingdom are translated to the granary above. The wicked in the field will, by this means, be brought into close association, with a view to burning them (πρὸς τὸ κατακαῦσαι αὐτά). It is not yet hell that awaits them, but the preparatory act of God's providence which disposes them suitably for their doom. Nobody can conceive such a work by visible angels before Christ takes to Himself the saints on high.

At present real Christians are mixed up in fleshly and worldly combinations. But when the harvest season begins, it will not be so. The bundles will be made up exclusively of the guilty objects for His judgment. None but the wicked will be collected and bound.

The wheat, the sons of the kingdom, are not left like the darnel on the field, but next brought together into Christ's granary. This means to meet the Lord in the air when at His call all the saints, dead and alive, are

changed in a moment and caught up to join Him, “and so shall we always be with the Lord.”

The Lord's explanation adds to the original parable. Here, information is given of what will be manifest to all eyes. In the providential action the bundles were not said to be removed from the field. They were left there to await their awful end. But later on during harvest “the Son of man shall send His angels and they shall gather out of His kingdom all offenses and those who do lawlessness, and they shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.”

The other side of glory is equally clear:

“Then (not before) shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who hath ears to hear let him hear.”

This is not the rapture to heaven, but the revelation from heaven. It is the display of His presence, the appearing of His coming, His day, when the saints are beheld with Him in the heavenly glory. Christ and they are manifested together: they are already with Him, not He alone before them, nor coming for them.

Thus, everything here is consistent with that later word which the apostle divulged in the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16-17). As both are parts of the truth of God, they harmonize perfectly, while each contributes its own portion suitably to the divine purpose on the appropriate occasion. We await the future in a perfect peace that rests on the blood of His cross. We also await it in a fullness of joy created by His love which is as rich in grace and glory as it is altogether beyond the mere

creature, and as sure as God's Word can make its revelation.

Parable Of The Net

In the parable of the seine or sweep-net (Matt. 13:47), we have the distinction kept up between the angels who executed the judgment and the fishers who drew it to shore and sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but cast out the worthless — a work uniquely suited to closing scenes. The Christian laborer is occupied with the good; he is an agent of that grace which saved himself. He leaves the worthless aside for those angels who excel in might, whose function it is to deal with them individually. It is no more a question of discipline with the fish than with the darnel. Any thought about wheat becoming darnel, or vice versa, is outside the Word of the Lord. There is no question of a good fish turning worthless or of the worthless rising to good. The bondmen like the fishers have a charge only to secure the good. This was a right and intelligent work, and in contrast to the bondmen's readiness, ignorant of self and of God's way, to uproot.

Here, it is again the kingdom, not the Church. Who can fail to see that they are plainly distinct? The kingdom was a familiar truth, though it took the form of “mystery” now. The Church is first announced in Matthew 16:18-19. The confusion of the two is a doctrinal blunder which has wrought great practical havoc in all ages to this day. In the Church we are bound to judge evil (1 Cor. 5); in the kingdom we are forbidden (as in verse 30 of this chapter). Punishment is a work for angels' hands, not for Christians. Christian are not called to resist evil, but to suffer, giving God thanks.

Here again we find that “in the end of the age the angels shall go forth and sever the wicked out of the midst of the righteous and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.” As there was a providential gathering of the darnel before the execution of the judgment, so there was a spiritual work by saintly men in sorting the good into vessels before the execution of the judgment to clear the wicked out of their midst. There is the great common principle that this judgment belongs to the angels, not to the saints, but there is a marked difference in that the gathering of the wheat was immediately into the heavenly garner, but the darnel were subjected to a longer process, with the same sad end as the worthless fish. It is the inverse here, for these wicked ones are severed from among the righteous there, as the worthless were taken out for the terrible judgment of everlasting fire.

Not a word implies any visible act in the binding of the darnel into bundles first, and then of the sons of the kingdom, the wheat, gathered at once into the garner. True, the Lord comes down into the air and the changed saints are caught up to meet Him there. The garner is not on earth or in the air, but in heaven. Then in due time, the saints follow Him out of heaven (as Rev. 17:14; Rev. 19:14 distinctly teach), for the day of the Lord and His judgment of the Beast and the False Prophet, the kings of the earth, the darnels too, and every other object of divine retribution, and the judgment of the living, is come. This easily falls in with the added explanation of both parables: on one side the display of the glorified saints, shining like the sun in the kingdom of their Father; and on the other, of the Son of man

through His angels clearing out of His kingdom all offenses and those who work lawlessness, into the furnace of fire.

The day of the Lord is the open introduction of the age to come by terrific judgments, and is never in Scripture mixed up with His coming to receive His saints to Himself for the Father's house. Hence we saw that the apostle appealed to His presence to gather the saints to Himself, as their bright hope, against the false and foolish notion, introduced by fraud and calculated to agitate and alarm, that the day of the Lord had actually arrived. Its imminence was not the error, for its imminence is an indisputable truth, which is important practically for souls.

1 Timothy 6:14

A favorite argument is that the Church must be on earth till the Lord appears, because Timothy is exhorted to keep the commandment spotless, irreproachable, until the appearing of our Lord. This is misinterpretation! Scripture connects responsible service and also the walk of all saints with the day or the appearing, never with His coming as such or our translation to meet Him on high, which is a matter only of sovereign grace. Responsibility attaches to His appearing because, when we come with Him, our place in the kingdom is decided according to our measure of previous faithfulness. To confound the two things is to lose the distinct truth and the special blessing of each. We are called to wait for Him with unclouded joy, but we are also bound, each to his particular work, and all of us to watch, abounding in mutual love, in order that we be confirmed blameless in

holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus.

It might have been hastily anticipated that this confirmation takes place when He comes for us. Such however is not the teaching of 1 Thessalonians 3:12, or any other Scripture. It will be at His coming with all His saints. Infinite love gave us the holy nature capable of proper walking. In giving us Christ as our life even now, we are to walk in love accordingly. This will have its consummation in that day, and in the communion of all who share it when the Lord comes to be glorified in all who are His in the fullest and most evident way. The establishment in holiness by love of the saints toward each other would go on and not stop short of that glorious day when the Lord is wondered at in all who believed, and this is only by their manifestation with Him in glory. How admirable Scripture is in thus binding up every day's walk as saints, with Christ's appearing in glory and of us together with Him in it!

Asleep or alive when He comes, Timothy and all other people of God will have their due place in the day of His appearing. In no case does it imply remaining on earth till that day, which would directly contradict Colossians 3:4 and is inconsistent with other Scriptures that reveal the glorified saints accompanying Christ, and out of heaven too.

It is the grossest error to look for the resurrection of those who compose the Church, or of the Old Testament saints in Revelation 20:4. Both are there, but already changed, in those seated on the thrones to whom judgment was given. The raising from the dead which then follows is exclusively of the Tribulation sufferers,

slain after the first general class of the glorified saints were caught up to be with the Lord. The two classes of Revelation-martyrs are now seen to be raised in order to share the reign with Christ for the thousand years.

1 But this principle the apostle does not call "the mystery kept secret since the world began; he only says that his gospel thus preached is according to the revelation of that mystery, which is but referred to, but opened out in the Epistle to the Ephesians and the Colossians. To say that scripture gives no grace to the church, except the mercy to the fathers and the oath to Abraham, is not only blank unbelief but flagrant contradiction of the apostle Paul.

2 These were exclusively of the N.T., as they in fact composed the foundation on which the church was built (compare Eph. 2:20, Eph. 3:5, and Eph. 4:11).

3 This is plain from Dan. 2, etc. For though the final blow falls on the feet of iron and clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, will have representatives in a separate though feeble form, to share the common irreparable ruin.

The So-called Apostolical Fathers on the Lord's Second Coming

A brief survey will suffice to test the worth of these scanty remains of Christian antiquity for the truth in question. The marvel is that any man of spiritual judgment who has read them with care should count them of the least weight, especially on such a matter. They have indeed a sorrowful interest, as they attest the rapid departure and profound downfall from apostolic teaching. Can anything be conceived more evident or striking than the immeasurable distance which severs these earliest writings from the scriptures? The Apocrypha, merely human as it is, does not so startlingly differ from the O.T. as do Barnabas, Clemens Rom., and Hermas from the apostles Paul, Peter, and John. Yet these productions were read like the scriptures to Christian congregations in early days; and Clemens Alex. quotes the most heterodox and nonsensical of the three as scripture! Even the Sinaitic Uncial has appended to the N.T. Barnabas and Hermas, as the Alexandrian has Clemens Rom. What a contrast these and all the rest from the dignity, holiness, love, and authority of the inspired Epistles! These early relics are merely the word of man, betraying not only weakness but trumpery. If able and learned men have lauded them to the skies, it only proves that tradition has blinding power, and that all have not faith.

Yet a pious man of our day ventures to say that “in God’s gracious providence we possess such early writings.” To what can one attribute infatuation like this in an evangelical clergyman but to his passionate zeal for the

Jewish hope against the Christian one? Judaising in any form tends always to strife and bitterness. How strange to be directed first to the “Didache” or “Teaching of the twelve Apostles”! Here then are the editio princeps of Bryennius (Constantinople, 1883), that of Hitchcock and Brown (New York, 1884), moreover that of H. de Roumestin (Parker and Co., Oxford and London, 1884), and Dr. C. Bigg’s little volume with at least equal discernment critically as any.

The fuller title is daring enough, “The Lord’s Teaching through the twelve Apostles to the nations.”

But it is a meagre compilation, beginning with the Two Ways of life and of death, which occupy six chapters, or nearly half of the little treatise, without one word to show how life is given or guilt removed.

Then follows an inept chapter on baptism, prescribing a fast to precede; and another chapter on fasting in general. The great difference from “the hypocrites” seems to be that they fast on the second and the fifth days of the week, whereas the right fast is on the fourth and sixth (or preparation)! They are also not to pray as “the hypocrites,” but as the Lord commanded, and thrice a day! In chapter 9 about the Eucharist, take the following flight: “As this broken [bread] was scattered over the hills and gathered together became one, so let thy church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom.” Can any thought be poorer?

The notable fact is that the Twelve apostles are made to forget the all-importance of Christ’s death in both baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Again, the name of David figures strangely in 91 and 10 where we have “the four winds.” After eccentric talk in 11 - 13 we have in 14

Mal 1:10, 14 utterly perverted, as do the Papists notoriously to the mass. It is the old unbelief of substituting the Church for Israel. Does our brother fancy that from east to west the name of Jehovah is yet great among the nations, or ever will be till the Lord returns in glory? Is he not as assured as those to whom he foolishly ascribes “the modern theory,” that only then, never before, “in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure oblation; for My name shall be great among the nations, saith Jehovah of hosts.”

Hence no apostle ever applied this prediction to Christianity in the N.T. It is the misinterpretation of the spurious Didache; for the true Twelve never really sanctioned it. But it suited the pride and the ignorance of the Catholic church even before Popery. Matthew Henry perhaps well skips the verse, for the nonconformists give scant heed to prophecy; but W. Lowth, T. Scott, and perhaps all other commentators boldly follow the antiquated delusion in full chorus. The late Dr. Pusey of course laboured to prove it, looking only at the Jews of the past and present. But his argument defeats itself; for the prophet speaks of no “new revelation of Himself,” but rather of the old promise made good in grace and power, not for Jews only but among the nations, when Jehovah shall be king over all the earth, one Jehovah and His Name one in that day. There is no excuse for misreading this bright prospect, still future, into the truly new and deeper revelation of His name as Father, which the Lord Jesus made known (John 4:21-23) for the hour that “now is,” when the true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and truth.

But let us turn to the last chapter of the Didache, “still more apposite” it is said. No one can doubt that Matt. 24 is therein mixed up with other scriptures which speak of the Lord’s coming, whether to mankind invisible or visible.” And then shall appear the signs of the truth (!): first a sign of an opening in heaven; then a sign of trumpet’s voice (or, sound); and the third, resurrection of the dead. Yet not of all, but as it was said, The Lord will come, and all the saints with him.”

Now Matt. 24:30 speaks, not of the sign of “an opening in heaven” appearing, but of the Son of man in the heaven as a sign of His coming to the earth, which causes all the tribes of the earth (or, land) to lament. But even the Didache cites Zech. 14:5 for all the saints coming with Him at this very epoch. Now this is our thesis, and it necessarily implies their previous change in order to come suitably to His appearing in glory. The mission of His angels (in ver. 31) with a great sound of trumpet cannot be for the gathering together unto Him of the glorified who all come with Him, but for the subsequent act of gathering together, after He appears, the elect of Israel from the four winds, scattered till then all over the earth. There is not a trace here of “the last trumpet” when the dead saints shall rise and we are changed, in order to come with Him in due time to gather the elect of Israel to the great King in Zion. For we must have been caught up before, that when He shall be manifested in glory, we too may then be manifested together with Him in it. There is no catching up in Matt. 24. Nor does it speak of the third sign of the resurrection of the saintly dead. Indeed no scripture treats it as “a sign.” They were raised to appear with

Him when He appears and “the world sees the Lord coming on the clouds of heaven.”

If it be argued that Rev. 20:4 speaks of the First Resurrection (after His appearing and the judgment of the Beast and the False Prophet with the kings of the earth and their armies, as well as the binding of Satan), not only is this admitted but its importance is insisted on. For it proves that there are stages in that resurrection as well as in Christ’s presence. We learn from that verse that the general company of the glorified (all the saints of O.T. and New, till Christ come for them) compose those who emerge from heaven as the Lamb’s followers. They were seen now seated on thrones, and judgment given to them; thereon two special classes of saints succeed, martyred in the earlier and later periods of the Apocalyptic crisis, who, as yet disembodied, were made to live, in order to reign with Christ for the thousand years, no less than the general company already enthroned. These all make up the First Resurrection. It is false and directly contradictory to this scripture that those Apocalyptic sufferers rose at the same time with the first company.

Is it too much to say that of the truth here revealed, the Didache, and Christians at large are still wholly ignorant? Why should that be incredible which the Revelation makes known in the clearest terms? These early writings are most defective and, through ignorance of the scriptures, often opposed to the truth; and so are moderns. Scripture alone is the standard; and the Christian is not left without a divine Guide dwelling in him to lead into all the truth. Let us believe God’s word as a whole, and not accept one part while we omit another.

But what we thus learn scatters into thin air the assumption that there were not to be distinct and different objects, both for blessing and for judgment, which unpractised eyes merge in one. Matt. 24 of course practically coalesces with 1 Thess. 5 and 2 Thess. 1 and many other intimations of the day of the Lord i.e. His coming judicially. But no one is entitled therefore to take for granted that the promised comfort and heavenly joy of the saints in John 14 and in 1 Thess. 4:15-17 will be at that same time, any more than that the Lord's "Parousia" in 2 Thess. 1 synchronises with "the appearing of His Parousia" in ver. 8. If these be equally seen by man, where would be the propriety of the change of phrase? The connection too is so different that the Parousia in ver. 1 is with sovereign grace, the epiphany of His Parousia is with signal vengeance. It is equally His presence in either case, but absurd to assume that they must happen together.

As the Lord's character of Son of man in that day will be judicial (John 5:22), the Parousia of the Son of man goes with His appearing. Thus He comes for Israel and the nations (Matt. 24:30, 25:31), but not so receives us to Himself for the Father's house. It is not that we deny in a general way what these brethren advance about "that day." In 2 Thess. 1 we have, as simultaneous effects of the Lord's revelation from heaven, the relief and vindication of the troubled saints, and the trouble and punishment of the wicked. But these are alike the exercise of righteous judgment, and not of sovereign grace; and hence neither can be till He appears in glory. Why should any be so absorbed in the earthly side of the Lord's Parousia as to be bitter against such as see and firmly hold the heavenly side also? We believe the

heavenly hope to be an immense gain for the Christian, having already known what it is to be ignorant of it, as almost all thus begin. But growth in the truth, or elevation above the visible sphere, if sound and spiritual, is a boon beyond price; yet God's word and Spirit alone can safely lead on.

The Didache then may have interest as being rather ancient, though of no doctrinal importance. It departs from the truth, even as to the saints choosing bishops (chap. 15); whereas scripture speaks only of apostles, or their delegate, choosing elders for them (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5). This was a radical change. Yet we need not suppose that it purposely left out elders, but (like Clem. Rom.) identified them with bishops, as scripture does: compare Acts 20:17 with 28; Phil. 1:1; and Titus 1:5, 7.

But with the earliest age how strange to hear of the "apostolic Constitutions," betraying as it does internal evidence of being centuries later? What evidence can it afford of "the first century belief"? The Didache just lets us see the growing decay a little earlier; the Apostolic Constitutions came after that. Both misapplied Matt. 24 to Christendom.

The Epistle of Barnabas was long before those spurious "Apostolic Constitutions." Who this Barnabas was we know not. It dishonours the apostle's early friend and fellow-labourer, "a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and faith," to attribute to him a document so childish in its mystical reveries. Yet it stands favourably contrasted with the probably interpolated Epistles of Ignatius, which too evidently evince the desire to cry up the clerical order. The Barnabas before us appears to have had at heart to counteract the judaising of that early

day. But a mighty chasm separates his work from the Epistle to the Hebrews, which with divine energy really translates the Levitical types as the figures of heavenly things. Tertullian, etc. show lack of discernment by assigning the inspired Epistle to the companion of the apostle (himself too without doubt the man whom the Holy Spirit calls an apostle). Yet this author sets up no such pretension, but had a due sense of his humble position. The true hope of the Christian is nowhere seen. All is vague and earthly, as with others far abler down to our own day. Spiritual intelligence in this respect is of the rarest.

Again, it is surprising that anyone who has the least regard for orthodoxy or even decency should cite from "The Shepherd" of Hermas. Besides, the Muratorian Canon has convinced all scholars, that this Hermas lived at about the middle of the second century, a brother of Pope Pius I, and not therefore "the brother" mentioned by the apostle. Far be it from my wish to expose the mere trash of a weak and fanciful mind in its Visions, Commands, and Similitudes. But it is a far graver case, when Hermas talks of God's holy angel filling a man with the blessed Spirit! of men's having all their offences blotted out because they suffered death for the name of the Son of God! and, worse still if possible, of the Holy Spirit being created first of all! Think of citing such a one on the question of our having to pass through the great tribulation! and of the comment on all this worse than nonsense, "Such was the belief of the Apostolic Christian." But let us draw a veil over the addendum on the false prophets who branded Jeremiah, and on Ahab, Zedekiah, and Shemaiah. Such vituperation must injure those that indulge in so

acrimonious a spirit on a question that needs the quiet and holy guidance of the Spirit of God.

It is singular that the Epistle from the Church in Rome to that in Corinth (assigned to Clement, perhaps the earliest of these extra-scriptural remains) is passed by; for it is comparatively sober and grave, earnest and affectionate. Yet it seems inconceivable that the Clement (a name then of frequent occurrence), to whom the apostle alludes as “my fellow-labourer,” could have written, as this Epistle does, of Danaides and Dirces2 (chap. 6), or of the fabulous phoenix. This last first appears in the Fragments of Hesiod (Loesner, p. 450), and swells into the legend that Herodotus relates in his garrulous way (ii. 73). See also Tacitus (Ann. vi. 28), and the elder Pliny (Hist. Nat. x. 2). Is it not humbling that what the old pagan historian found incredible was accepted by Clement of Rome, with a whole cluster of later Fathers assenting, such as the Latins, Tertullian and Ambrose, and the Greeks, Origen, Epiphanius, Cyril Hier., Greg. Naz., etc.? Archbp. Wake and Mr. Chevallier were influenced by P. Young (Junius) to omit the heathen reference in chap. 6 as an interpolation; but the discovery since of added MS. evidence corroborates the insertion, however discreditable it must be to those who drew up the letter to Corinth. For Clement does not claim the Epistle as his own. It was probably a composite communication, like the letter from the apostles and elder brethren to the brethren of the Gentiles in Antioch and elsewhere (Acts 15), Clement taking the part in Rome that James had done before in Jerusalem. But what a wide difference between the brief and authoritative wisdom divine in the one, and the

prolix elaboration, with faulty and compromising details, in the other!

How again could Christian saints of intelligence cite Isa. 64:4, and 1 Cor. 2:9, and stop short, as ignorant souls do to-day, of the apostolic addition, “But unto us God revealed [them] through the Spirit”? (See chap. 34) For this is just the wondrous favour we enjoy above the O.T. saints by Christ’s redemption, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. It means unwittingly, that one ignores the vantage ground of Christianity in the presence of the Spirit, that we are no better off as to this than Israel of old.

This Epistle is also exceedingly reticent as to the Lord’s return, and hence precarious in its quotation of prophecy. Take that from Isa. 60:17 in chap. 42. This is the application. “Preaching therefore through countries and cities, they [the apostles] used to appoint their first-fruits [a hazardous statement] to be bishops and deacons over those who should believe, after having proved them by the Spirit. Nor this in any new way; for in truth it had in long past times been written concerning bishops and deacons! For the scripture somewhere saith, I will appoint their bishops in righteousness and their deacons in faith.” Now a Christian has only to read the prophet in order to be convinced of the outrageous mistake. The chapter as a whole supposes the day of glory come for earthly Jerusalem, the city of Jehovah, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel; when the afflicted but spared people shall become a strong nation, and, what is better still, shall all be righteous. It is a picture quite different from the glorified church, the holy Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from God. The force of ver. 17 is that in

the day of restored Israel Jehovah will make their rulers peace, and their officers righteousness. Neither war nor exaction shall be any more. Is this fulfilled as yet?

There is here absolutely no room for an allusion to bishops and deacons in the churches; it is pure hallucination. But it is worse by far. It indicates, like the Epistle of Barnabas, that which soon overran Christendom like a flood, the sprouting of the Gentile conceit, of which the apostle warned the saints in Rome. The promises abide for Israel, who are yet to be blessed as a people under Messiah and the new covenant. Branches of the olive-tree by their unbelief were broken off, and Gentiles meanwhile grafted in; but the Gentile tenure is by faith and contingent on their continuance in goodness: otherwise they also shall be cut off. Nothing is more certain than that the professing Gentiles have utterly failed, are unbelieving to excess, and must end in the apostasy as the apostle predicted.

Equally certain is it (even from this chapter and all the prophets) that Israel will not continue in their present unbelief, but shall be grafted in again. Their hardening is only till the fulness of the Gentiles be come in; “and so all Israel shall be saved.” These are enemies in the gospel days which will soon end. God has not forgotten His promises, or His election of the fathers; He only awaits the right moment, when the Gentile complement is made up, to prove His faithful love to Israel. For His gifts and calling do not admit of change of mind. Christendom from early days assumed on the contrary that He had cast off Israel, and given the church an indefeasible title: a false, proud and ruinous delusion. Here in these apostolic fathers the germ grows and

spreads apace as it were flag-weed, till judgment destroys it for ever.

Are these the men or the writings to produce as of value to interpret the scriptures which reveal a truth incompatible with this vain conceit? For their denial of Israel's hopes led to the transfer of earthly glory to the church now, and the consequent refusal of present suffering, forgetful of future glory on high: the abandonment of the true portion of God's church. These early fathers had lost the truth of our calling upwards, and took more and more the glowing visions announced to Israel as meant for us, and not for them. To maintain the heavenly privilege in its power and purity we must own that to Israel God destined the earth, with the Gentiles rejoicing in willing subjection. But we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies even now in Christ, and to be with Him there in the day of glory. To seek earthly power and glory now is for the church high treason to Christ.

But the principle of looking to "the early belief" is a false one, the ignis fatuus of the Tractarian movement, and the fully developed lie of Popery; which, if there is to be an interpreter, demands and professes to have an infallible one in itself, the Holy Catholic church, and now indeed the Pope. This of course when plainly stated the Protestant abjures. The Christian, the church, believing in the ever abiding presence and operation of the Holy Spirit sent forth on and since Pentecost, has what the latter confessedly lacks, what the former vainly and madly professes. The Spirit dwells here below to guide into all the truth, and makes this good in the measure of our faith and spiritual state. For He is here to glorify Christ, not the saint or the church; who are only right in

awaiting Christ's coming for our glory with Him. Now is the time for lowly service, unworldly devotedness, and self-renunciation, yea for sharing His rejection and suffering. It is no time for reigning without the apostles, and without Christ; it is the time for entire dependence on Him in separation from the world, content ourselves to be meanwhile reviled, persecuted, and defamed like our betters for Christ's sake. The scripture is the standard; in no way what the Christians may have believed, thought, said, or done, even in apostolic days.

Hence the saints in Rome are warned not to be high-minded but fear; and we have already seen why. It was the very snare which misled them and all Christendom to deny God's faithfulness to Israel, and to claim the succession to Jewish power and honour now on earth, which could not be without forfeiting present rejection and future glory on high with Christ.

Still more manifest and manifold is the care to correct the church in Corinth (with all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, theirs and ours) from their aberrations. There were internal divisions and carnal strifes; clashing schools of thought with chiefs (however themselves unwilling) dragged in to accentuate the rival parties. What more opposed to the one Head and the one body? They were puffed up, instead of mourning at the horrible leaven unjudged in their midst. They were not ashamed that anyone of them should prosecute his suit before the world, and not before the saints as the Lord had laid down. They were loose as to personal purity, the known prevalent immorality of the place. They needed to have the marriage relation etc. cleared and defined. They were admonished against their levity as to heathen temples

and sacrifices. They were reminded authoritatively that those who labour in the gospel are entitled to live of the gospel, whilst it was the apostle's own joy to make it without charge, in the Spirit of Christ not using his right. They were warned that preaching to others without personal self-abnegation is an awful peril. Nor is it only preachers that need to take heed; but any Christian if unwary will fall, as is seen in the wilderness history of Israel, types of us. Open disorders too are reproved, not only in women forgetting their place of subjection, but in scandalous dishonour to the Lord, even at His supper, it would seem through mixing the love-feast with it, but really through their bad state of soul. Further, the principle and practice flowing from the Spirit's action individually and congregationally were fully stated to guide them and us, in chaps. 12-14. with the deeply needed intervening chapter calling for love to enforce and characterise both. Most pointed too in the bearing on our subject is chapter 15, which proves how little "early christian belief" can be trusted; for some among them questioned a resurrection, though it does not seem that they doubted the immortality of the soul.

It is the scripture that we accept, not only as the source of divinely given truth but as its criterion. The Holy Spirit is the sole unfailing interpreter, just so far as we look to Christ's glory. If we seek our own things, calling them perhaps the church's glory or right, we have no promise from God and no security for ourselves; but on the contrary we shall have to learn our folly. One might similarly apply several more of the Epistles, besides the greatest for general Christian doctrine, and the no less great for ecclesiastical truth and order.

Notably again the Epistle to the Galatians calls for a few words in proof that what the early Christians held is not the smallest guarantee for the truth. For the apostle writes to the assemblies of that considerable region in Asia Minor, where he had himself planted the gospel, to reproach them sadly and solemnly with having so quickly changed from him that called them in Christ's grace to a different gospel which is not another. It was truly a perversion of the gospel of Christ. If saints, after the best of all preaching in that early day, could so soon follow judaizers, and fall from grace into legalism as the apostle affirms, can any thoughtful mind be surprised that they might soon slip into defective views and even error about the Second Advent?

But we need not assume this. The Epistles to the Thessalonians prove doubly the fact, and not the danger only. For the apostle, in instructing them more on that glorious truth, had in the First to correct, at least as soon, their mistake about their deceased brethren, and in the Second to expose a still wider and worse error about the day of the Lord for living saints. How plainly the mystery of lawlessness was already at work!

It is not for any one to minimise the incalculable moment of the proper hope of the Christian. But nothing is easier to understand than the difficulty it presented to the Jews that became Christians, accustomed only to the Lord's coming as predicted in the O.T. to deliver the godly remnant of Jews at the last gasp, as it were, from the apostate mass of their fellow-Jews with the Antichrist at their head and the Roman Beast his patron and ally, and from the vast assemblage of the Eastern nations, their embattled or besieging enemies under the King of the North, and the Russian Gog behind the

latter. The remnant justly look for Christ's advent in displayed power and glory to overwhelm both their internal and external foes, and thus deliver themselves on the earth. Also Gentile believers, again, were slow to enter into the blessed wonder of Christ's coming to translate on high all real Christians, in its grandeur far beyond what Enoch or Elijah experienced of old: so completely was it beyond even saintly men's expectation or conception. Only Christ's promise and God's new revelation could account to our souls for such surpassing glory. Hence to the inspired word of the N.T. we confidently appeal, as it only is here entitled to convince any.

But we specially invite the attention of our opposing brethren to a consideration which escaped all the Patristic remains, and every theologian till our day. For we love them, and mind not overmuch froth and fury signifying nothing, due also to their zeal for the little which fills their vision, having most of us passed through similar objections and prejudices. Scripture we found far larger and higher than a scheme based on the O.T. hope, confirmed as it is by N.T. revelation. For we frankly acknowledge its truth and its importance, if rightly applied. Yet the N.T. also reveals what was of old hidden but now manifested, that Christ, on His total rejection by Jew and Gentile, was to sit raised from the dead at God's right hand; and this, not merely to be Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek, as He intercedes too for His friends, and by-and-by to strike through kings in the day of His wrath when His enemies are made His footstool. He was to be there now for a new order of things, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not

only in this age but also in that which is to come. For God put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. This is the great secret now revealed.

It is not my aim to trace the means which the apostle unfolds, in pursuance of the exalted Head, that we may know God's operation in associating us who now believe with Christ in the heavenlies, as we read in Eph. 2 - 4, but to direct renewed and closer attention to the counsels of God who made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good. pleasure which He purposed in Him (or, Himself) for administration of the fulness of the seasons. These seasons will only be full when Christ comes again, to carry out to God's glory as the Second man all the trusts in which the first man has so conspicuously failed. In Christ will be then displayed the obedient Man, the Governor, the Depository of the promises, the One to make the law great and glorious, the Priest, the Prophet, the King of Israel and Son of Man, Ruler of all peoples, nations, and languages, the Head over all things to the church. For Satan is still the prince of the world, and the god of this age. And the Lord, though crowned with the chaplet of victory and King of kings in title, is not yet seated on His own throne but His Father's, till He appears with His many diadems and establishes His world-kingdom. Then only will all things be summed up in Christ as the centre of the universe in the day of manifested glory, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, in Him in whom we also were given (or, obtained) inheritance, being predestined according to His purpose that works all things according to the counsel of His own will.

The heading up of the universe in Christ as in Eph. 1:10 must be carefully distinguished from the gathering together into one of the scattered children of God, of which John 11:52 speaks. For Christ died that there might be now the holy gathering into one of God's children, for which He also made request in John 17:20, 21. But that heading up is of all things in God's creation, "the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth," now so long severed, and the earthly at least made subject to vanity through man's fall. But all things groaning below shall be freed from the bondage of corruption when the coming glory is revealed, with Christ the Heir of all things at its head. At present it is an operation of divine grace to call out and together from Jews and Gentiles God's children (and if children, heirs also: heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ), if indeed we suffer with [Him], that we may also be glorified with [Him]. This is the day of grace, and an indisputably elective process; that, a gathering of the whole creation both heavenly and earthly; which is so far from meaning the church either now or then, that we His members are expressly here distinguished from "all things." The inheritance we, God's heirs, are to share with Christ in that day. For this we have the Holy Spirit as earnest, who has also sealed us already for redemption's day.

This then is the revealed purpose of God for the glory of Christ and the church, His body and bride. Tradition furnishes not an echo of it. Universal consent, if we can speak of such a thing in presence of the Babel of Christendom, rises not above the earth. First, such writers as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus looked for a glorious metamorphosis of nature, for a grander

Jerusalem on earth, and vines bearing prodigiously, not for Israel, but for the glorified saints (c. Haer. v. 333, ed. Massuet)! Then later Eusebius (V. C. iii. 15, 33, iv. 40, etc.), in a reaction from such grotesque stuff, treated the prophetic visions as fulfilled in Constantine's victory over Paganism, with worldly ease and honour for the Christian profession! Along with this came in souls blessed after death as an alternative interpretation; so that the resurrection as well as Christ's coming well nigh vanished, save for judgment; and the sheep and the goats were confounded with the great white-throne-judgment of the dead.

Yet the Lord had intimated even to Nicodemus that God's kingdom has "heavenly things" as well as "earthly." Again He pointed out to the disciples the distinction of the Father's kingdom on high for the glorified saints, from the Son of man's kingdom below out of which are to be cleared those that practise lawlessness. These truths paved the way for the Spirit to reveal that purpose of God for the heavens and all the things in them, and for the earth and all the things on it, to be set under Christ as the Head over all things to the church. Had this truth been received, it would have guarded saints from setting the one against the other, the common source of manifold error and evil. Here our brethren, like ourselves, have to take heed and learn.

1 The equivalent appears in Clem. Alex., and Origen, all referring, as Dr. Bigg judges, not to the Lord, but to the Eucharistic cup! It really seems so; but how incongruous the mixture of Jewish figure with a strictly Christian institution!

2 ‘To say that those heathen women “attained the firm centre of faith” and that they “weak in body received a noble reward” is to surrender the gospel, unconsciously but really. It is inexcusable error, not to say downright folly.

The Separate State, and the Resurrection

When we have learned a truth, even in power from God, such is the narrowness of the human mind, that we are in serious danger of making it a shut-door against other truths, and thus of stopping short of the largeness of God's thoughts. Indeed the more imposing a truth, the greater is the peril lest it become all-absorbing. "But the Advocate, who is the Holy Ghost (blessed and divine safeguard!) whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." "When he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all the truth."

Thus Jesus, after speaking of the many mansions in His Father's house, and of going there to prepare a place for His own, said, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." It is clear that He did not mean death, nor the destruction of Jerusalem, nor the end of the world. He Who was going away promised to come again. If it was a real and personal departure of Jesus, it was to be as real and personal a return, not to reign over them in their place, but to take them to His place that He and they might be in heavenly bliss together. Right therefore it is, that our hearts should feel how very distinct a thing our going to Him is from His coming to receive us unto Himself in such sort as this.

Again, our souls may have drunk somewhat into the triumphant strain of the apostle when he cries, "Where,

death, is thy sting? where, death, is thy victory?" Death is not our joy, but He that has won the victory, the Living One Who became dead, and, behold, He is alive for evermore and has the keys of death and of hades. Hence can the Christian say that all things are his, life or death, things present or things future. But death is not, nor ought to be, the object of His affections. Christ is the Bridegroom; not Christ known after the flesh, for henceforth as a new creation we know no one thus. We know Him the risen and ascended Man; and, He being of heaven, we look for Him to come for us to fetch us there. For us He is the Heavenly; as even we are so too by His grace, and no longer of the man of dust as once.

Meanwhile in the Spirit knowing Him where He is, we long for that which will fully express His power and glory, assured even now of His love in all its fulness. We long for His coming and the resurrection of all that slept in Christ; we long for His coming that in those surviving till then the mortal may be swallowed up of life, without even dying. Happy as it is assuredly to be rid of the body of humiliation as now, happier still in the departing to be with Christ, it is not all that our hearts are set on. Living or dying, we long for His full triumph, and the consummation of His joy, in having all His heavenly ones as Himself and with Him at His coming.

For we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in an instant, in an eye's twinkling, at the last trumpet. For sound it will, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. "Far better" than the present life is our departure to be with Him in the separate state; yet it is not His victory, but rather the last experience for the body of that which sin brought in. It is "when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption,

and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then (and not before) shall come to pass the word written: Death is [lit. was] swallowed up in victory."

Nevertheless it is an error to depreciate the blessedness of those who, absent from the body, are present with the Lord. When the word of truth in its simplicity and its fulness speaks out, this may not be touched. To the dying robber, who prayed the Lord to remember him when He should come in His kingdom, Jesus said, "Verily I say to thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." He thus proffers a blessing beyond and better than he asked, to the renewed mind a dearer prize than any outward display, however glorious: the joy of being that very day with Christ Himself, where the Father delights to love and honour the Son. It is not that the presence of Christ will be lacking in the kingdom, nor shall we be less able to enjoy it in that day. But He promised him this blessed companionship at once on high before He comes in His kingdom. This none should disparage: no honour or reward can equal it; and thanks be to God, we shall have it for ever.

The saints then that were put to sleep through Jesus, as 1 Thess. 4:14 beautifully puts it, shall not be separated by death from God's love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nor did Stephen when stoned only look to the coming of Christ, though this he surely did, but says, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit;" as the Lord had said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." So Paul later says, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain... having the desire for departure and being with Christ-it is very much better" (Phil. 1:21-23). There was not nor could be a doubt between death and resurrection. The hesitation was about "living in the flesh," as being

needful for others in loving service; but as for himself individually, to depart and be with Christ was “very much better.”

The best of all is for Christ to come; and so at the end of the same Epistle (Phil. 3) we have the proper hope for Paul and all. “For our citizenship (or, commonwealth) is in the heavens; from which also we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity with his body of glory, according to the working of his power to subdue even all things to himself.”

This quite agrees with the apostle’s language in 2 Cor. 5, where in the face of death and the judgment-seat he expresses the common Christian confidence and willingness to be absent from the body and present with the Lord. But here he speaks of what is the best of all. “We groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed (i.e. death and the separate state), but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.” He longed for the change at Christ’s coming.

But we must beware of a prevalent error which denies the heavenly blessedness of paradise and seeks to make a purgatory of it. Scripture is wholly opposed to this falsifying of its character. Even where it first occurs, the aim is to reveal that the converted robber can forthwith be with Christ. Such is the immediate efficacy of His redemption for one who truly believed in Him, though only at the last brought to God.

Not less inconsistent with the low and superstitious idea is the light conveyed by the apostle Paul’s words in 2

Cor. 12:2-5. He identifies being caught up to “the third heaven” with being caught up into “Paradise.” It is the highest view of heaven that scripture discloses; it leaves no room for the idle dream which consigns to some lower receptacle a soul whose fitness to partake of the inheritance of the saints in light is not achieved. For this meetness is taught by Col. 1:12 to be already conferred by grace on all believers here. The scheme, so widely preached now, is a dark unbelief of the gospel, derived from mere Jews and Gentiles, not from scripture, and meant to comfort those who die in their sins without Christ by a hope wholly unwarranted. There is not the smallest ground for it in inspiration.

The testimony of our Lord in Rev. 2:7 is if possible more explicit and absolutely decisive. For to the overcomer in the church at Ephesus He promises that He will give him to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God. No one can question that this contemplates the future glory when that which is perfect is come, and the redeemed are changed into His image even for their bodies. Yet He calls it paradise; and in Rev. 22:2 we see it fulfilled. Both texts therefore of this wondrous final book of scripture concur to explode as unfounded the assumption that paradise is not heaven. It is its most favoured quarter, where Christ went when His atoning work was done; where those who die in faith of Him and His work go to be with Him; and where they shall taste its sweetest enjoyment, when they have their bodies changed into the likeness of His glory at His coming. The revival of patristic tradition is a revival of heathenism, entirely at issue with what has now been manifested by the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus,

who abolished death and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel (2 Tim. 1:10).

W. K.