Notes on 1 Thessalonians

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1 Thessalonians

The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians.

Preface.

It will not be denied by any considerate Christian of intelligence that there is room and need for fresh help in studying these earliest Epistles of the great apostle. The Homilies of Chrysostom, even if available generally, consist chiefly of exhortation. The comments among Jerome’s works, were they certain, are of the slightest account, and avowedly supposititious.

Passing over the regular commentators, such as Calvin and others, Bishop Jewell has in his works an exposition upon these two Epistles, which reflects his characteristic ability, eloquence. and learning, his solid piety and earnestness, with the deepest abhorrence of Popery, of all Christian or quasi-Christian systems the most offensive to God and the most perilous to man. As the Bishop of Salisbury died in September, 1571, this work was posthumous, the original edition in 8vo. having the date 1583, the second 1594, and not appearing in the folio collections, but of course in the more modern edd. of his works, the Parker Society series, etc. The version of the N. T. followed is that of Geneva; there is no evidence of critical research into the disputed questions of text or translation; but that familiarity with the fathers and ecclesiastical history shines, for which the author was as renowned as Abp. Ussher at a later date.

As these Epistles bring out into special prominence the coming and the day of the Lord, the right handling of

this subject becomes a crucial test, wherein foreign divines like Zwingle and Musculus, etc., fail no less than Rollock, Ferguson, etc. Even Bengel's spiritual tact here breaks down signally; for he ventures to say (Gnomon on 2 Thess. 2:8) that the appearing of the Lord's coming is before His coming itself, or at least its first shining out: a statement which directly clashes with such scriptures as Col. 3:4, Rev. 17:14, Rev. 19:14. To my mind Mr. Jowett's edition is a painful one, from the rationalistic incredulity which perverts even his scholarship. In treating Plato or Thucydides he is at home and reliable. Bishop Ellicott's contribution is critical, erudite, and reverent; but he is so under the influence of the reputed standards of Anglican divinity that he cannot rise to the height of the inspired text, particularly in profiting by that revelation of the future which is put forward in such varied and striking forms throughout both letters to the Thessalonians.

To speak with the least slight of others who have laboured on this portion of Scripture is, however, so invidious a thing for one who sends out a new little work that I forbear to say more. Those who examine candidly the pages that follow are responsible to judge as in His sight Who has communicated a treasure so great as His own truth. May we be subject to His written word, and so understand, enjoy, and walk in the power of His Spirit.

London, 13th May, 1893.

1 Thessalonians 1.

The coming of the Lord characterises both these Epistles, which are the capital seat of that great truth. Of early date in the writings of the apostle, they bespeak

simplicity, freshness and vigour in the saints addressed. They warmly, overflowingly, answer to their hearts, in kindred tones, but so as to lead on and deepen them. Hence the informal manner, not didactic but practically interweaving that blessed hope with every topic, with every duty, with all sources or motives of joy and sorrow so as to imbue the inner man and outer ways of all the saints day by day.

Those of Thessalonica, it appears from Acts 17:6, 7, had from the first received strong impressions of the kingdom. But they needed instruction on that large and fruitful theme, which, like every other revealed truth, affords ample room not only for unintelligent mistake but also for baneful error. Both in time wrought among these saints; and as the first epistle supplied that which sprang from mere ignorance, the latter corrected what was unequivocally false and mischievous. In the two epistles the presence or coming of the Lord is carefully distinguished from the day of the Lord, their true characters set out distinctly, and their due relation to one another explained. The need for this is as urgent now as then; for though the error was then both recent and active, it is shown to be grounded in a certain preparedness of the heart for it, inasmuch as to this day there is the same propensity to stray similarly, and the same difficulty in appropriating the revelation of God. The commentators ancient and modern are dull in seizing the different sides of the truth as the Spirit has given them, and though it is only in our own day that the chief mistranslation (2 Thess 2:2) has been set right, on all sides the truth which should have been cleared by the correction seems as little understood as ever. The course of things in Christendom, as in the old world

before it assumed that new shape, indisposes the minds of those bound up with its interests to receive what is here taught. The coming of the Lord as a living and constant hope detaches the heart from every thing as an object on earth: for He is coming, we know not how soon, but we do know, to receive us to Himself on high. As is the Heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly and as this is the character in which Christ and the Christian stand correlatively, the hope exactly corresponds. It is independent of earthly events and is not a question of times or seasons. At a moment purposely unrevealed, that those who are His own might be truly and intelligently and always looking for Him, He will come for them that they may be with Him in His Father's house.

The day of the Lord, on the other hand, connects itself with earthly associations of a solemn kind, of which prophecy in the Old and the New Testaments alike speak; and this also has its suited place in these epistles. It is indeed eminently adapted, as it is meant, to deal with the conscience; for that day will deal with the pride of man and the power of the world, with earthly religion and with lawlessness in every form. Further, it is a test in one sense for the affections, whether we do really love His appearing who will put down evil and establish all in order according to God.

But we turn to the apostle's words in their order and detail.

"Paul and Silvanus and Timotheus to the assembly of Thessalonians in God [the] Father and [the] Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace." (ver. 1.)

Such is the inscription, with its own marked and beautifully suited peculiarities. On the one hand there is the marked absence of relative or indeed of any official place in the address of the apostle or the association of his companions, who are graciously introduced like himself without form. On the other hand the Thessalonian assembly is said, here and in the opening of the second epistle, to be “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” which is predicated of none other. What can harmonise so well with new-born saints, just delivered from the gods many and the lords many of heathenism, and brought into the conscious relationship of babes that know the Father? To us, Christians, there is but one God the Father, of Whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom are all things and we by Him. But what an expression of tenderness and near relationship thus to speak of the assembly of Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! How sweet for them to be thus addressed as even corporately set in the fellowship of such love and light! But such is the principle in the manifestation of the divine ways of grace. So even in the comforting ways of the Jewish prophet it is written, “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” Those who are most needy receive special care and consolation.

For the infant assembly so characterised it was enough to say the brief but pregnant words, “Grace to you and peace.” To others a fuller form was becoming, here needless because of what went before.

“We thank God always for you all, making mention at our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of

faith and labour of love and patience of hope of our Lord Jesus Christ before our God and Father, knowing, brethren beloved by God, your election; because our gospel came not unto you in word only but also in power and in [the] Holy Spirit and in much assurance; even as ye know what we were among you for your sake. And ye became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with joy of [the] Holy Spirit; so that ye became a pattern to all that believe in Macedonia and in Achaia. For from you hath sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith that is toward God hath gone out, so that we have no need to say anything. For they themselves report concerning us what sort of entrance we had unto you, and how ye turned unto God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to await his Son from the heavens, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus that delivered us from the coming wrath." (vers. 2-10.)

The joy of the labourer's heart bursts forth in constant thanksgiving to God for them all, and this not vaguely but with special mention on the occasion of prayer. It answered to their joy who had so lately been brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of God; but it had the deep character of rising to the Blesser from the blessing, as the blessing itself savoured of communion with that source of blessing. So had Paul wrought with God in Thessalonica, not merely with some of the Jews who were persuaded and who consorted with him and Silas (or Silvanus), but especially with a great multitude of the devout Greeks: a mighty and permanent work in no long time. Do we know such thanksgiving to God? Do we make like personal mention on like occasion? Do we

unceasingly remember the fruit of the Spirit's blessing in the saints? We know what it is to pray for saints in sorrow, shame, danger, need: are we drawn out in joy before God at the working of His grace in those He has saved and gathered to the name of Jesus? Have not our hearts been straitened by the low and shattered and isolated circumstances of the once united saints? We are quick in putting out, cutting off, withdrawing, avoiding, and every form of repulsion; slow and powerless in the grace that sees and enjoys grace in others, that wins, helps, welcomes, and restores. Not so the apostle and his companions. Doubtless great grace is needed to appreciate little grace. It is Christ-like.

Granted, that here among the Thessalonians, especially when the first epistle was written, there was as much power of life as there was simplicity with lack of knowledge. The three great spiritual elements, of which we often hear in the New Testament and notably in the apostle's writings, were manifest and in the fervent vigour of the Holy Spirit: not only faith, but the "work of faith," not love only but "labour of love," and hope of our Lord Jesus Christ in its patience or enduring constancy. And as Christ is the object of faith which exercises the heart and fixes it on things unseen, so does His grace call forth love, and the hope cheers along the way, and so much the more when all is in the light of God, "before our God and Father." He is our Father, and if babes we know Him as such (1 John 2:13); but He is God, and in our life, in our ways, we are before Him, and would serve him acceptably with reverence and godly fear. He, before whom the new life in Christ is thus exercised by motives which have their spring and power in Christ, is the God who chose the Thessalonians in His grace to be

His children beloved by Him, as thus attested to the consciences and affection of those that serve Him, “Knowing, brethren beloved by God, your election.” What practical proof of our election can there be to others but in the manifested power of the life we have in Christ, maintained as it can only be by seeking to have in everything a conscience without offence toward God and men? To gather evidence for ourselves out of it is mere self-righteousness, as well as the unbelief that slights God’s testimony to Christ and His work, the effete theology of Christendom hastening on to divine judgment.

But God has ever wrought blessing by the revelation of Himself. Hence it is of faith that it may be according to grace, as the law works wrath; for where no law is, neither is there transgression. But the glad tidings as preached by Paul and those with him, “our gospel,” is the full testimony of what is in Christ for the lost. This had been brought home to the Thessalonians in the energy of the Holy Ghost. “Because our gospel came not unto you in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance; even as ye know what we were among you for your sake.” (ver. 5.) This young but devoted, persecuted yet happy, assembly was the living testimony to God and His Christ. The gospel had come not in word only but in power, and as it was in the Holy Spirit not fleshly display, so was it in much assurance. The word was spoken with all boldness and certainty by men whose ways were its bright and genuine reflection in love. This produced corresponding effects in those who received it. For Paul and his companions were not like such as seem incapable of appreciating the glory of Christ in the gospel as in the church; who are never

weary of crying up one part of the truth to the disparagement of another, as if all did not centre in our Lord: short-sighted and mischievous souls, who overlook the simplest elements of truth in self-admiration, and a broker-like pressure on others of the value of their own wares. If all were teachers where were the evangelists? If there were none to awaken souls, where the sheep to be fed and tended.

The Thessalonians too bore the impress of the power which wrought on their hearts and consciences. “And ye became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with joy of the Holy Spirit; so that ye became a pattern to all that believe in Macedonia and in Achaia.” (vers. 6, 7.) They suffered bitterly for the truth which filled their hearts with joy; so Paul dying daily while he lived; so the Lord Who died as no other, yet lived the perfect ensample and fulness of joy in God His Father with utter rejection here below.

How different those in Thessalonica from their brethren in Corinth who soon followed, who slighted the weightier matters of practical grace as they gloried in the showier displays of sign-gifts and external power. And what a difference in the moral testimony! Never do we hear of the Corinthians as a pattern to any that believed in Macedonia or in Achaia. Yet did the apostle’s heart yearn in love over his later children in the faith, untoward and unruly as they were, that God’s unspeakable gift of grace might produce suited if late fruit in them also.

Nor was this all: the world was full of strange tidings and this beyond all Greece where the believers were impressed with the zeal and moral power of the

Thessalonian assembly. “For from you hath sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith that is toward God hath gone out, so that we have no need to say anything.” (ver. 8). Men were talking everywhere of the singular change and fact in that important entrepôt of trade which lay in the direct line between the West and the East. That a body of people should have abandoned their false gods, and be filled with the knowledge of the one true God in a joy which no sufferings could chill (as distinct from the Jews as from the heathen, and yet more distinguished in an all absorbing life of faith, love, hope, never so seen there before) could not but strike minds so acute, speculative, and communicative as the Greek. The sound of it rang out like a trumpet’s in all directions, not about miracles or tongues, but their faith Godward: surely a fine, admirable, and gracious testimony had gone out in the midst of idolaters. For it was wholly in contrast with the hard proud legalism of the Jews, as decidedly as with the dark and indecent follies of the Gentile world. Indeed the effect was such that the apostle declares “we have no need to say anything.” Why preach that which the very world in a certain way preached? Preaching has for its aim to make known the unknown God and His Son, to rouse the slumberers, to gain the ear of the careless for God’s good news. Here men’s lips were full of this truly new thing in Thessalonica; and from this active centre of commerce the report went out everywhere of a Macedonian assembly that renounced Zeus, Hera, Artemis, Apollo, and all the rest, without adopting circumcision or the institutions of Moses.

Nor was there anything vague or pretentious, but the sobriety of grace and truth. “For they themselves report

concerning us what sort of entrance we had unto you; and how ye turned unto God from idols to serve a living and true God and to await his Son from the heavens whom he raised from the dead Jesus that delivered us from the coming wrath." (vers. 9, 10.) It is a grand object of Satan to combine the world with God, to allow the flesh while pretending to the Spirit, and thus really to fall under his own delusions while professing Christ. The reverse of all this Babylonish confusion is seen in the sort of entrance the apostle had among the Thessalonians, and the complete break made for their souls from all that is opposed to God known in light and love. They turned unto God from their idols instead of christening them and mocking Him; they served not forms or doctrines or institutions, but a living and true God; and they awaited His Son from the heavens, not as an awful and dreaded Judge, but as their Deliverer from the coming wrath, whom He raised from the dead, the pledge of their justification and the pattern of the new life of which they lived to God in the faith of Him.

1 Thessalonians 2.

Such was the vivid and powerful effect of the Apostle's visit to Thessalonica. There was an unmistakeable and deep impression produced by the conversion and walk of the saints there on those outside, around and everywhere. Their faith went forth as a living proclamation of the truth; "so that we need not to speak anything." How happy, when the work is in such power and freshness as to leave the workman free for other fields white already unto harvest! What glory to the Lord, when the very heathen aroused and amazed by the

result in power before them cannot but talk of the true God and His Son!

Now, the apostle draws a good sketch of his “entering in,” as to its character and bearing on the saints themselves, an internal picture, as before we were told of its external effect.

“For yourselves know, brethren, our entrance unto you that it hath not been vain. But having suffered before, and been outraged, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God in much conflict. For our exhortation [is, or was] not of error, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile; but even as we have been approved of God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God that proveth our hearts.

For neither at any time were we with speech of flattery, as ye know, nor with a cloke of covetousness, God [is] witness; nor seeking glory of men, neither from you nor from others, when we might have been burdensome as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle in the midst of you, as when a nurse cherisheth her own children; so yearning over you, we were well pleased to impart unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls because ye became beloved by us. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and our toil; working night and day that we might not burden any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. Ye [are] witnesses, and God, how holily and righteously and blamelessly we behaved ourselves to you that believe, just as ye know how each one of you as a father his own children we [were] exhorting you, and comforting, and testifying that ye

should walk worthily of God that calleth you unto His own kingdom and glory" (vers. 1-12.)

The apostle could confidently appeal to the inner consciousness of the brethren. The entering in of Paul and Silas, which they had to the Thessalonian saints had not been empty. A divine purpose of grace, reality in pressing the truth on consciences, and energy of the Holy Spirit, had characterised their service and produced corresponding results. And no wonder; for it was the love of Christ constraining to the love of perishing souls, which knew not God nor the power of His resurrection who had tasted death even for them. Assuredly too, it was neither an ostentatious show nor a holiday visit, but an errand so serious in the eyes of their visitors, that no object by the way or on the spot detained; "but having suffered before and been outraged, even as ye know, in Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God in much conflict" (ver. 2).

Their injurious treatment at the hands of the Gentiles in Philippi no more daunted their unconquerable faith and love than the subsequent persecution by Jewish spite and jealousy at Thessalonica. No experience of suffering can turn aside those whose mind is to endure all things both for Christ and for the elect's sake, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. Hence their confidence: "we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God in much conflict." If there was the assurance that the glad tidings were God's, they were emboldened in God to speak out whatever the opposition or violence that environed them. So, if the apostle had now to exhort the saints in Thessalonica that no one might be moved by their

affliction, it was not as a dilettante divine, laying on the shoulders of others a burden which he would not move with his own finger. From the first he was called to suffer for Christ's name, as distinctly as to bear that name before Gentiles and kings and sons of Israel, to open their eyes that they might turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they might receive remission of sins and an inheritance among those that are sanctified by faith in Christ. And in this he wrought with burning earnestness, to which "much conflict" refers, rather than to mere external trouble on the one hand, or that wrestling for the saints against the wiles of the devil, of which we hear in Col. 2:1, on the other hand. He walked and served in the truth he taught.

"For our exhortation [is, or was] not of error, nor of uncleanness, nor of guile; but even as we have been approved of God to be entrusted with the gospel so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God that proveth our hearts" (vers. 3-4). There was as good a conscience as boldness and endurance. There was integrity of heart, the very reverse of playing a part, instead of becoming the victim of delusion and so misleading others. Error was as far from the exhortation as impurity, nor was there the least intent to deceive, which "guile" expresses; but the truth was pressed holily and sincerely; and so spoke these blessed labourers, as became those who knew they had been approved of God to have the gospel entrusted to them. Grace forms responsibility, as grace enjoyed in the soul maintains its force livingly. They had God before them, God that proveth the hearts, not men to please whose breath is in their nostrils: wherein is man to be accounted of?

This is a grave and abiding principle, as true and important now as when Paul thus spoke of himself and his companion in the service of Christ. One cannot serve two masters. Patrons and congregations are not the only snares. Desire of influence, dread of disfavour, party, ecclesiasticism, may interfere with allegiance to the Lord, and righteousness in that case will surely suffer, perhaps truth itself. So Satan works in Christendom to the dishonour of Christ. The attempt to serve more than one is fatal; for a man will either hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. If a labourer in faith regards himself as approved of God to be entrusted with the gospel, he will only the more take heed to himself that the ministration be not blamed, but in every thing commend himself as God's minister. Only he will seek to hold fast liberty as much as responsibility in the Spirit, with the written word as his sole rule. An apostle had the same direct responsibility to the Lord as the least labourer in the gospel, and, as we see here, owned it for himself as he urged it on others. It is no question of right but on Christ's part; it is solely of responsibility on ours. This maintains His glory and our obedience. To us there is, and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, to whom are all things, and we through Him; as there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto Him. May we be imitators of the apostle, as he was of Christ.

But there is the snare of mammon as well as of a master rival to Christ; and we cannot serve God and mammon. Here, too, the apostle could appeal to the experience of the Thessalonian saints. "For neither at any time were we with speech of flattery, as ye know, nor with a cloak of covetousness, God [is] witness; nor seeking glory of

men, neither from you nor from others, when we might have been burdensome [or, stood on dignity] as apostles of Christ" (vers. 5, 6). Those with whom Paul and the others were conversant could bear witness whether his speech was that of flattery or words of truth and soberness. God was his witness whether covetousness was concealed under any pretext. But there are other ways in which the corruption of our nature is apt to indulge and betray itself. Hence many a man who would not stoop to flattery and may not be covetous is vain or ambitious. How in these respects had Paul and his companions carried themselves? "Not seeking glory of men, neither from you nor from others, when we might have been burdensome as apostles of Christ." He sought their blessing in the testimony of Christ, not theirs but them for God's glory; and instead of claiming just consideration in carnal things as sent of the Lord on spiritual service, there was thorough self-denial in devotedness to Christ.

Now he turns to the positive side of their walk and work. "But we were gentle in the midst of you, as when a nurse cherisheth her own children" (ver. 7). The figure of a parent, even a mother, fails to convey the tender care of a love which has its spring in God Himself. Babes need a nurse, which all mothers are not; but a nurse cherishing her own children is the just figure here employed, not a hireling for another's offspring. "So yearning over you, we were well pleased to impart unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye became beloved by us" (ver. 8). Where else is there anything to compare with this in unselfish love unless it be in the persevering faithfulness of grace which watches over the same objects in their growth

end difficulties end dangers afterwards? “For ye remember, brethren, our labour and our toil: working night and day that we might not burden any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God” (ver. 9).

Paul wrought with his own hands in Thessalonica as in Corinth, whence he wrote to them, that he might be chargeable to none. Yet if anyone was entitled to say, like Nehemiah, “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down,” it was the apostle, who truly did in another sense come down, and so much the better did his great work though never was there a greater mind than his who thus laboured manually night and day during his brief stay among the Thessalonians. “Ye [are] witnesses, and God, how holily and righteously and blamelessly we behaved ourselves to you that believe.” He sums up his appeal to the believers and to God Himself, as only one could do who exercised himself to have a conscience void of offence toward God and men alway. “Just as ye know how each one of you as a father his own children, we [were] exhorting you and comforting, and testifying that ye should walk worthily of God that calleth you unto His own kingdom and glory” (vers. 11, 12).

Love adapts itself to the wants of those loved. So did the apostle when the saints needed more than the food of babes. And what earthly father ever made good his relation to his own children as Paul to his beloved Thessalonians? Each one and all were objects of unremitting and considerate vigilance. Exhortation, comfort, testimony never failed to stimulate, cheer, and direct in the ways that befit the God that calls unto his own kingdom and glory. There He will have His own with Christ soon and for ever; in that hope, and worthily

of it, He would have them now to walk. Such is the aim of a true workman of Christ; and no lovelier picture can anywhere be found than appears in the simple sketch here drawn by the Apostle.

Thus far for the ministry of Paul and his companions. Now he turns to the means God had used for the blessing of the saints by that ministry.

“And1 for this cause we also thank God unceasingly that, when ye received [the] word of [the] report from us of God, ye accepted not men’s word but as it is truly God’s word, which also worketh in you that believe. For ye, brethren, became imitators of the assemblies of God that are in Judea in Christ Jesus; for ye also suffered the same things of your own countrymen, even as they also of the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and please not God, and [are] contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, to fill up their sins alway; but the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost” (vers. 13-16).

Man as he is naturally lives without God, acted on by the things he sees around him, a prey to the desires of the flesh and of the mind. In order to a spiritual link with God he needs a revelation from Him; and God is now sending this in the glad tidings concerning His Son, that men may believe and be saved. Thus does the soul know God, and Jesus Christ whom He did send, and this is life eternal. By faith he begins to feel and think according to God; and faith is the reception of a divine testimony. Thereby he sets to his seal that God is true. The word of God mixed with faith puts into immediate association with God.

In apostolic days Paul, as here, was an instrument to convey God's word in his preaching; and this, by divine power, without admixture of error. So it is in the Scriptures, which as being inspired of God exclude mistake. Hence, while they are of the richest value as a medium of communicating the truth, they have their special and indeed unique function as being the divinely given standard to try every word and work.

Not only, then, had the Apostle laboured in the power of the Holy Ghost and in a way suitable to the beginning and growth of those who were the objects of his ministry, but it was not in vain. There were sweet and manifest fruits in God's grace. "And for this cause we also thank God unceasingly, that, when ye received the word of the report from us of God ye accepted not men's word, but as it is truly God's word, which also worketh in you that believe." It is always a true effect of God's gracious power when souls in a hostile world receive His testimony, however perfectly His word meets the cravings of the heart and presents the blood of Christ to purify the conscience from the dead works to serve the living God. There is a constant network for men to hold them fast in Satan's hand; and the truth, as being God's word, judges the thoughts and intents of the heart. It was yet more trying when the truth was as novel as it must ever be opposed to human will and reasoning. When many profess it, the reproach to a great extent disappears, though God does not fail to counteract Satan's wiles, who would thus destroy the power by making the form cheap and common. To the Thessalonians, as indeed to every Gentile then, the word reported was a new thing. But it was "of God," and so they proved it. "Ye accepted not men's word, but as it is

truly God's word." The heart bowed to God, and the word also wrought by the Spirit of God its own divine effects in those subject to it by faith.

The Jewish matron was true to the instincts of humanity and the traditions of her race, when she saw the Messiah casting out demons and heard Him warning of a worse power of the enemy those who still sought a sign from heaven; out of the crowd she cried, "Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the breasts that Thou didst suck." The gospel renders it plain and certain that it is no question of a relationship after the flesh, but of the authority and blessing of the divine word, and thus as open to the Gentile as to the Jew. To believe it is the obedience of faith. It is to be in living association with God, which cannot be otherwise.

The word wielded by the Spirit and received as of God thus separates to Him, and is indeed exactly what is called "sanctification of the Spirit" in 1 Peter 1:2: not in the practical sense (which follows in ver. 15, 16 as well as elsewhere), but, in principle and absolutely, that setting apart to God from the beginning which constitutes a saint (see. 1 Cor. 6:11). Hence it precedes the knowledge of forgiveness or the possession of peace with God; as Peter says, in (or by) sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Here nothing but prejudice would have hindered believers seeing that obedience is not merely faith-obedience, but practical. Now sanctification in the ordinary sense cannot be said to be for or "unto obedience," seeing that it very largely consists of obedience, and cannot exist without it; but sanctification of the Spirit as here spoken of is for (εἰς) obedience, and such as Christ's in contrast with a mere Israelite's.

It is also for “sprinkling with His blood,” for the new life or divine nature in the saint wishes to obey God even before it knows the efficacy of His blood in a purged conscience; and hence the perfect order of the words in the phrase.

The want of seeing this has greatly embarrassed the commentators, and has even led, to positive falsification, as in Beza’s Latin Version and the Geneva English Version, which render the clause unto (ἐν) sanctification of the Spirit through (εἰς) obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ! This is to sacrifice, not grammar merely, but God’s word to a defective system of theology, which only acknowledges the sanctification that is consequent on justification, and ignores the primary setting of the person apart to God by the Spirit, which is true of every saint from his conversion, when he may not yet rest by faith in Christ’s blood. Erasmus, though perplexed, is nearer the truth than the Vulgate, followed by the Rhemish, which yields no just sense whatever. Archbishop Leighton is one of the few who saw that sanctification here does not mean inherent, gradual, or practical holiness, but that work of the Spirit which from first to last separates from nature and the world to God (compare 2 Thess. 2:13).

The same spiritual cause produced kindred effects. All are not Israelites, neither are they Cretans, and the flesh in all, if unjudged, affords a ready occasion to the enemy who presents snares suited to beguile each. But the Holy Spirit forms by the image of Christ, presented in God’s word, which is effectual not only to beget souls to God. but to clear, correct, instruct, reprove, and in every way to discipline, as well as cheer on, the believer. Of this the apostle reminds the Thessalonians. “For ye,

brethren, became imitators of the assemblies of God that are in Judea in Christ Jesus." Difference of race, contrast as to previous habits of religion, cannot hinder the power of grace and truth. The Thessalonians followed in the same path of suffering and endurance as the Jewish assemblies in Christ Jesus. There the flame of persecution burnt fiercely against the companies that bore the name of Him whom they had crucified. It was not otherwise for the Thessalonian saints from their own countrymen.

There is no such hatred as that embittered by difference in religion, and especially where the claim is exclusive and divine. The gospel gave occasion to this in its most concentrated form; for it first had to make its way where God had really given peculiar privileges, which it was quite right to maintain in all their value as long as He owned the people to whom He had given them. But the Jewish people slighted and abandoned them, killing the prophets who pressed their infidelity and apostasy on their consciences, as they crowned their guilt when outward forms seemed orderly, but real unbelief and enmity to God were laid bare, by the ignominious rejection and death of their own Messiah. But evil is insatiable, and even the cross only whetted their rancour against the witnesses of divine grace. They "drove us out."

For the possessors of law are provoked to madness by the preaching of grace, which makes little of any earthly privileges whatever, and insists on the ruin of the Jew as much as of the Gentile. Hence the Jew's undying hatred of the gospel. It were bad enough to hear a testimony as much above and deeper than the law, as Christ is greater than Moses; and the difference is really

immeasurable. But to proclaim its incomparable blessings in Christ so as to obliterate all distinction, and to bring the believer, Jew or Gentile alike, into a new place of heavenly relationship and of everlasting favour, is intolerable. This, then, was necessarily the final dealing of God as far as Israel's responsibility was concerned. All hope for the nation on the earth was buried in the grave of Christ. They had a last appeal from the Holy Ghost in the gospel witnessing of Christ exalted to heaven; but they refused the message as much or more than the Person, above all when they saw others, yea, Gentiles, entering into the good which they had spurned for themselves.

Thus they "please not God, and [are] contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, to fill up their sins always; but the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost." It might not yet be executed, but it impended, and no small part became their portion after the apostle passed away. Still it rests on the,Jew, but it is not yet expended; and were the Jew to return to his land, to rebuild the city and the sanctuary, and to take possession as far as possible of his ancient heritage, it would be but a deadly delusion and a satanic snare, bringing on them first Antichrist, then the trouble from the Assyrian, and finally the Lord Himself in unsparing vengeance, however mercy may in the end rejoice against judgment. As, however, the apostle does not lift the veil of the future, (as in Rom. 11). from their prospects, but returns to the new relations of grace, the common joy of himself and the Thessalonian saints, we too follow the line of the Holy Spirit here.

“But we, brethren, being bereaved of you for a little season [lit., of an hour], in person, not in heart, made more exceeding diligence to see your face with much desire. Wherefore2 we desired to come unto You, I, Paul, both once and twice, and Satan hindered us. For what [is] our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? [Are] not even ye before our Lord Jesus3 at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy” (vers. 17-19).

Doubtless, if Christianity gives the deepest importance to the individual with God, the assembly affords the largest scope to the affections of the members of Christ as His one body. And Satan hinders in all possible ways the happy interchange of what is so sweet and holy, the mind and love of heaven enjoyed among saints on earth. The presence of each other, above all of such an one as Paul, what a difference it makes! Still the apostle had been introducing that which ought to correct any undue moment given to bodily presence. Had he not been showing the all-importance of God’s word, and how effective it is in the hand of grace? Absence, therefore, is in no way fatal to the saints’ joy and blessing. Waiting but exercises faith, and should increase the longing desire, which after all was stronger in Paul than in his Thessalonian children; how much in Him Whose patient waiting is as perfect as His love to us! Thus does he bind their hearts with his own (and may it be true of us also!) in the joy of Christ’s presence at His coming. Then will be the true rest from labour, then the enjoyment of the fruits without alloy or danger. May we find ourselves habitually thus looking onward from present hindrances to that blessed and everlasting scene!

1 Thessalonians 3.

Grace works by joints and bands in the body, which is so constituted by our Lord Jesus to this end. If Paul could not visit the Thessalonians, he sent Timothy. Love seeks not its own things, and can find resources according to Christ, whatever the hindrances which Satan puts in the way.

“Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought good to be left behind at Athens alone, and sent Timothy our brother and workfellow4 under God in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage concerning your faith, that no one might be moved by [lit., in] these afflictions. For yourselves know that for this we are set. For even when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we are to suffer affliction, even as it came to pass, and ye know. On this account I also, when I could no longer forbear, sent that I might know your faith, lest perhaps the tempter had tempted you and our labour should be in vain. But when Timothy came just now unto us from you and brought us glad tidings of your faith and love, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, longing to see us even as we also [to see] you: on this account we were comforted by you, brethren, in all our distress and tribulation through your faith, because now we live if ye stand fast in [the] Lord. For what thanksgiving can we render again to God for you for all the joy wherewith we rejoice on your account before our God, night and day beseeching exceedingly that we may see your face, and perfect what is lacking in your faith? Now our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus direct our way unto you; and the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all, even as we also

toward you; in order to establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints" (vers. 1-13).

To the apostle visiting Athens it was no small trial to forego the companionship of his true and beloved child in faith. But his affectionate concern for the Thessalonians could not otherwise be satisfied. He knew that they were but babes spiritually, and that they were exposed to enemies, Jewish and Gentile, as subtle as determined and unscrupulous. He was himself about to brave Satan in a stronghold of his religious influence and of philosophic speculation, where the name of Jesus had never yet been proclaimed, still less had he himself the fellowship of brethren in Christ with whom to pray and take counsel. A storm of popular fury, stirred up by Jewish instigation among the Gentile rabble, had burst out against Jason (Paul's host) and other brethren in Thessalonica, which led to the hurried leave of Paul and Silas that night after a sojourn of but few weeks. The same Jewish influence had stirred up the crowds at Berea, whither they had repaired, and where they found a yet readier reception of the word, and withal remarkable care in bringing what was preached to the test of the scriptures. There Silas and Timothy staid, while Paul was once more hurried off to Athens. But the heart of the apostle could not rest as to the Thessalonians, young as they were, and exposed to danger, suffering, and snares. "And we sent Timothy our brother and work-fellow under God in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage concerning your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions. For yourselves know that for this we are set. For even when

we were with you, we told you beforehand that we are to suffer afflictions even as it came to pass, and ye know." The Holy Spirit by the apostle, as the Lord Jesus previously, had given full warning of the special and constant troubles that await the saint in passing through the world — peace within beyond thought of man, peace in Christ, but tribulation in the world. Faith alone can enjoy the one and endure the other. Such is meant to be the experience, none other the expectation, of Christians while waiting for Christ. Even the youngest must thus learn, for the real enmity of the world and of its prince spares none, and so the apostle prepared the converts in Thessalonica to look for distress. Nor was this at all too soon. They had already the gravest reason to know the truth and wisdom of his warnings, but they had the witness of love in the visit of Timothy for their establishment and encouragement concerning their faith. Grace only could call into such a path; grace alone can sustain in it; but grace does not fail. Still the Lord works by means, as by Paul's sending, by Timothy's going and comforting the saints, and by their joy in the consolation, whatever might be the pressure of affliction. Flesh would weary, murmur, doubt, and turn aside from the truth which entailed such sorrow. Faith sees Christ, gives God thanks, perseveres at all cost, and grows by the exercise. while the links of love are strengthened on all sides.

"On this account I also, when I could no longer forbear, sent that I might know your faith, lest perhaps the tempter had tempted you, and our labour should be in vain. But when Timothy came just now unto us from you, and brought us glad tidings of your faith and love, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, longing to

see us even as we [to see] you; on this account we were comforted in you, brethren, in all our distress and tribulation through your faith; because now we live if ye stand fast in [the] Lord." The Second Epistle will afford ample evidence that the apostle might well dread that the tempter would avail himself of the circumstances to dishonour the Lord in those who bore His name at Thessalonica. For the present, however, the work stood in the vigour and freshness in which it began, and Timothy had such good news to bring back as cheered the fervent and affectionate heart of him that sent him, and changed his anxieties into thanksgiving that rose above all his own distress and affliction. Their faith shone, their love burned, they had always good remembrance of the stranger to whom they were indebted for hearing of the living and true God, and of His Son the Deliverer risen from the dead Who is coming from the heavens. They longed to see again the messenger whom they recognised as bringing them unequivocally God's word, whatever the varied storms of trial it had brought on them from man, the very trials proving their sincerity and truth, for had they not been told before that so it was to be? It was strength as well as joy to the labourer, as he most energetically expresses it, "now we live if ye stand fast in [the] Lord."

The joy of the apostle, as it was of divine love, so was it holy: no vain proselyting zeal, but delight in the presence of God over that which was the fruit of His grace to the praise of Jesus; delight over that faith and love kept bright and firm, in young confessors of Christ left alone, notwithstanding the fierce hostility of Jews and Greeks. "For what thanksgiving can we render again to God for you for all the joy wherewith we rejoice

on your account before our God, night and day beseeching exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?" If theirs was the love of Jonathan, his was certainly more than the love of David. It is the love of the divine nature in the power of that Spirit, which finds its ever-growing joy in the blessing of others, and especially of those already blessed, that what is wanting may be perfected in personal ministry. "Now our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way unto you; and the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all, even as we also toward you; in order to establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."

Such was the prayer dictated by the apostle's affection as the Holy Spirit brought their need before him in God's presence. And the way of the apostle was directed to the Thessalonians, but not before another epistle to them followed, and years of labour elsewhere intervened. What he meanwhile seeks for them is no less important for ourselves and all saints — the increase and abounding of love in us, one toward another, and toward all, in order to the establishing our hearts unblameable in holiness. This is God's way as surely as it is not man's; for he insists on holiness in order to love, whereas in truth love must work in order to holiness. It is a true principle from the gospel all the way through; for God's love it was that met and blessed us in sovereign grace when we were enemies, powerless and ungodly, in Christ's death for us, and this was the most powerful motive which wrought in us to holiness. So is it here among the saints, who are exhorted to love

mutually as well as toward all, in order that their hearts should be confirmed in holiness without blame; even as Christ, in love to the church, first gave Himself, and then washes with the word, that He may present it to Himself glorious, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

But there is another consideration of great weight and interest in this brief prayer. Not only does he join in a most striking unity our God and Father Himself with our Lord Jesus in his earnest prayer for the blessing of the saints by a renewed visit, but he desires that the Lord may confirm their hearts blameless in holiness “before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints” — not merely now before God, so that it should be real, but at the coming of the Lord with all that are His, without a break in thought till that day when the failure or faithfulness of each shall appear beyond controversy. For as it is a question of responsibility, it is not simply His coming that is here spoken of, but His coming with all His saints, that is, His day when they shall appear with Him in glory, and He shall come to be glorified in His saints and to be admired in all them that believed. How this brings the light of that day on the present hour! Even if one may not for the Lord’s sake walk with all the saints now, it is not that the heart is alienated, but it anticipates that glorious scene in which they shall come forth with Him, the objects of our love because they all are of His.

1 Thessalonians 4.

The knowledge of Christ is inseparable from faith; yet is it pre-eminently a life of holiness and love, and not a mere creed, as the human mind tends to make it. We have seen how it wrought in the practical ways of those

who first preached the gospel to the Thessalonians, in unselfish goodness and exposure to suffering (1 Thess. 1, 2), as well as in deep feeling afterwards for the young converts, so soon called to bear the brunt of affliction. For their abounding in love in order to holiness the apostle prayed the Lord (1 Thess. 3). Now he proceeds to appeal to themselves: —

“Further, then, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that, as ye received from us how ye ought to walk and please God, even as also ye do walk,5 ye abound still more. For ye know what charges we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is [the] will of God6, your sanctification, that ye abstain from fornication; that each of you know how to possess himself of his own vessel in sanctification and honour, not in passion of lust, even as also the Gentiles that know not God; that he should not over-reach and wrong his brother in the matter; because the Lord is an avenger in respect of all these things, even as we told you before and fully testified. For God called us not for uncleanness but in sanctification. Wherefore then he that disregardeth disregardeth not man but God that [also] gave7 His Holy Spirit unto you” (1 Thess. 4:1-8).

It is an immense thing for those who were once mere men on earth, severed from God and in spirit from each other by sin, only united when united for objects of human will or glory, now as His children with one purpose of heart to walk so as to please God. Yet such is Christianity practically viewed; and it is worthless if not practical. It is true that there is in the light and truth which Christ has revealed by the Holy Ghost the richest material and the fullest scope for the renewed mind and heart. But there is in “the mystery” no breadth nor

length, no height nor depth, which does not bear on the state of the affections or the character of the walk and work; and no error more dishonours God or damages man than the divorce of theory from practice. Scripture binds them together indissolubly, warning us solemnly against those who would part them, as evil, the sure enemies of God and man. No! truth is not merely to inform but to sanctify and what we received from those divinely given to communicate it is “how we ought to walk and please God.” In that path the youngest believer walks from the first, slave or free, Greek or Scythian, learned or unlearned; from that path none can slip save into sin and shame. It is not, however, a mere defined direction, as in a law or ordinance. As a life is in question, the life of Christ, there is exercise and growth by the knowledge of God. On the state of the soul depends the discernment of God’s will in His word, which is overlooked where levity marks the inner condition, or the will is active and unjudged. “If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” Then only is there surefootedness spiritually; and a deepening sense of the word in the intelligence issues in a fuller obedience. One knows God’s mind better, and the heart is earnest in pleasing Him. We abound more and more.

This was no new solicitude of the apostle. They knew what charges he gave them through the Lord Jesus. Is not His will, His honour, concerned in a walk pleasing to God? He on earth could say, “I do always those things that please Him;” in heaven He is now occupied with those who are following in the same path here below. We may fail; but is that our aim’? He does not fail to help us by His word, as He would also by His grace if we looked to Him and leaned on Him. Do we hear His voice?

On one thing especially was the apostle urgent, the personal purity of those who bore the name of Jesus; and the more so as the Greeks utterly failed in it. Their habits and their literature, their statesmen and their philosophers, all helped on the evil; their very religion conduced to aggravate the defilement by consecrating that to which depraved nature is itself prone. Few can have any adequate notion of the moral horrors of the heathen world, or of the insensibility of men generally to pollutions so shameless Christ changed all for those who believe in Him, leaving an example that they should follow His steps. “For this is God’s will, your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication; that each of you know how to possess himself of his own vessel in sanctification and honour, not in passion of lust even as also the Gentiles that know not God, that no man over-reach and wrong his brother in the matter; because the Lord is an avenger of all these things, even as we told you before and fully testified.” Holiness, of course, goes far beyond freedom from sensuality. Still to stand clear of that which was everywhere sanctioned in ordinary life was no small thing. Nor is the apostle satisfied with the negative duty of abstinence, but calls on “each of them to know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honour,” instead of letting it drift loosely into sin and shame, “not in passion of lust, even as the Gentiles also that know not God.” Acts 15 is proof positive on scripture testimony of that day, painfully confirmed by the disclosures of Pompeii and Herculaneum, to the moral degradation that pervaded even the most civilized portion of the heathen world. When God is dishonoured, man is reprobate; and God, in forgiving and rescuing from the wrath to come through Christ’s death and resurrection, gives also a new life in

Christ on which the Holy Spirit acts by the word so as to produce fruits of righteousness by Him to God's glory.

Hence the exhortation further, "that he should not overreach and wrong his brother in the matter, because the Lord is an avenger in respect of all these things, even as we told you before and fully testified." There is no real ground to introduce a new topic here, confounding with Calvin and others τῳ πρ. with τοῖς πρ., still less to suppose with Koppe τῳ enclitic = τινι, "any," like our own Authorised Version (compare 2 Cor. 7:11). It is the apostle's delicate way of referring to the same uncleanness, especially in married circumstances where the rights of a brother were infringed. This demanded and receives special notice. For as the brotherhood of Christians casts them into free and happy and intimate intercourse, there would be peculiar danger in these very circumstances, lest Satan should tempt where flesh was not kept by faith in the place of death, that love only should act in holy ways with Christ before their eyes. There is perhaps no danger more gravely pressed. They are the ways which bring wrath on the sons of disobedience, and all words which make light of the evil are vain: the Lord avenges all these things, and God will judge the guilty. It is not the true grace of God which spares the strongest and repeated warnings; for God called us not for uncleanness, but in sanctification. It is plain that there is no branching off to commercial dealings, or to dishonesty in the affairs of every-day life. Impurity in the social relations of the saints is the evil still in view: and the conclusion is, "Wherefore then he that disregardeth disregardeth not man but God, that also gave his Holy Spirit unto you." Thus does grace, in calling to a moral duty, rise entirely above the mere

weighing of such motives as act on men. It is not that delicate consideration of man is omitted: the apostle begins with the slighting of man in the matter, but he forthwith brings in also the immense yet solemn privilege of the Christian, God's gift of the Holy Spirit. How would impurity affect Him Who dwells in the saints, and makes the body God's temple?

Next follows a call to abound in brotherly love, in which the apostle does glide into the connected proprieties of daily labour animated by care for others. "Now concerning brotherly love ye have no need that we write to you; for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another; for, indeed, ye do it toward all the brethren that are in the whole of Macedonia. But we exhort you, brethren, that ye abound still more, and that ye make it your aim to be quiet and mind your own affairs and work with your own hands, even as we charged you, that ye may walk honourably toward those without, and may have need of nothing" (vers. 9-12). The possession of Christ does wonderfully bind hearts together; and as affection one toward another is a spiritual instinct, so all that is learnt of Christ deepens it intelligently. Intercourse may test its reality sometimes, but as a whole develops it actively, and the more as sharing the same hostility from the world. Here, too, the apostle looks that it should abound more and more, and along with it the studious aim to be quiet and to mind their own affairs, which brotherly love would surely promote: the very reverse of that meddling disposition which flows from the assumption of superiority in knowledge or spirituality or faithfulness. Further, he calls on them to work with their own hands, even as we charged you (and who could do it with so good a grace?), that they

may walk honourably toward those without and may have need of nothing [or none]. There is not such a thought as encouraging the needy to draw on the generosity of others. Let it be the ambition of those who love, and would keep the love of others, to spare themselves in nothing and avoid encroaching on the help of any, so as to cut off all suspicion from those without. Brotherly love would be questioned if heed were not paid to propriety; it flourishes and abounds where there is also self-denial.

Having thus exhorted the saints to personal purity, and connected divine love with the quiet discharge of daily duty, so often apt to be neglected on that very plea and the vain pretension to higher ways, the apostle now turns to their immoderate sorrow and surprise at the death of some among them. So filled were they with the expectation of the presence of the Lord, that they had not conceived the possibility of any saints thus passing away. They looked only for His coming, and drew inferences which, not being of the Lord, exposed them, as all human reasonings do, to danger. The need then was to maintain the truth, whilst guarding from such a misuse; but grace vouchsafed fresh and fuller light for them and for as.

“But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those that fall asleep;8 that ye be not grieved even as the rest also that have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also those put to sleep through Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say to you in [the] word of [the] Lord, that we, the living that remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede those put to sleep; because the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout of

command, with archangel's voice, and with trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, the living that remain, shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet [the] Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. So then encourage one another with these words" (vers. 13-18).

The Thessalonian saints knew, as a settled certainty of the Lord's coming and kingdom. They were waiting for Him, the Son of God, from heaven as a constant hope, the nearest hope of their hearts. They had never taken into account that He might tarry according to the will of God who would gather fresh souls to the fellowship of His love, while letting the world ripen in iniquity and lawlessness, whether in proud unbelief or in hollow profession, till the apostasy come and the man of sin be revealed. As to all this they lacked instruction, having enjoyed the teaching of the apostle for but a short season, and no epistle being yet written. This is the first St. Paul ever wrote; and while promoting the joy and growth of faith, of nothing does he write as a more necessary help than to supply a lack, which, if not filled up by divine revelation, laid active minds open to the enemy, through speculations which he would soon suggest, in order to undermine the truth already known, or their souls' confidence in God.

Their grief was excessive like the rest of men, Jews, or rather heathen, that have no hope. Why such extravagant sorrow about those who, if called hence, knew God's love and salvation in the Lord Jesus? Is life eternal a vain thing? Is remission of sins, or the possession of the Holy Spirit? Surely it must be only ignorance on their part, and not that any called of God to His kingdom and glory (not to speak of the church,

Christ's body) could forfeit by dying, as they imagined, their blessedness when the Lord Jesus comes. And so it was for want of knowing better that they had yielded to thoughts which had plunged them in Christ-dishonouring sorrow.

Even here, however it is remarkable that the apostle does not unveil the state of the separate spirits, as we see done in Luke 23:43, Acts 7:59, 2 Cor. 5:8, and Phil. 1:23. He meets fully the error that death in any way destroys or detracts from the blessed hope of the Christian. He would have the saints no longer ignorant concerning those who may most truly be said to fall asleep; if they do, it is but more evidently to have the portion of Him Who died and rose, as we assuredly believe; for they will rise if they meanwhile die. And is such a resurrection a loss? "Even so those also put to sleep through Jesus," as it is here beautifully described, "will God bring with Him." They were laid to sleep by Jesus; and, far from forgetting or even postponing their joy and blessedness, God will bring them with Jesus in that day.

But how so, since they sleep in death, and He comes from heaven in power and glory? Hereon follows a most enlightening and fresh communication, "in the word of the Lord," which clears up the difficulty by unfolding the order of events, and thus the way by which the sleeping saints are to come with Jesus. The Thessalonian believers had fancied the departed would miss the blissful reunion, or at least come behind the living that remain. But it is not so. "For this we say to you in [the] word of [the] Lord, that we, the living that remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede those put to sleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from

heaven with a shout of command, with archangel's voice, and with trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, the living that remain, shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in [the] air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. So then encourage one another with these words." Such is the wondrous intimation in this striking episode which brings us up parenthetically to the introductory words which assured them that the Lord would come, and the saints, including those that sleep, along with Him. Here we learn how it can be: He first descends for them, and afterwards brings them with Him.

But there are details. He shall Himself descend from heaven with "a shout of command." The word employed, being peculiar in the New Testament to this passage, cannot but have special force. Outside scripture it is used for a general's call to his soldiers, for an admiral's to his sailors, or sometimes more generally as a cry to incite or encourage.

It seems most appropriate as conveying a word of command to those in immediate relationship. Not a hint drops of a shout for the world, for men at large, to hear. It is here for His own to join Him on high. "with archangel's voice" brings in the highest of heavenly creature glory to attend the Lord on that transcendent occasion. If angels now minister to the saints, as we know they did to Him also, how suitable to hear of "archangel's voice" when they thus gather round Him! Nor is "God's trump" silent at such a moment, when all that is of mortal man in His own shall be swallowed up of life at the presence of Christ.

Accordingly “the dead in Christ rise first.” It is no question of the first man but of the Second; and all of that family who have slept “rise first.” So unfounded was the despairing sorrow of those in Thessalonica. So far they precede the living saints, in being the earliest to experience the power of life in the Son of God. The truth is, however, that the difference in time is but just appreciable; for “then we, the living that remain, shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in [the] air.” The translation of all the changed saints is simultaneous. The grief of such as doubted the full blessedness of those meanwhile put to sleep was really ignorance and unbelief; for even if they could not anticipate the fresh revelation from the Lord, they ought, from their divinely given knowledge of His love and of His redemption, to have counted on His grace towards the dead saints no less than towards the living. They might have sought needed light as to the particulars from those raised up and given of the Lord to impart it. We can, however, readily conceive how haste wrought injuriously in them as in ourselves. But what an unspeakable mercy that grace met the need to the correction of the mistake then, and to the prevention of it afterwards! So is it habitually in the Epistles especially, as in all scripture.

It is important to note that “the general resurrection” is as foreign to this part of God’s word as to every other. The faithful dead, the faithful living, are alone spoken of. Not that there will not be a resurrection of unjust as well as of just. But there is no such thing in scripture as a resurrection of all men together. Of all things resurrection separates most distinctly. Till then there may be more or less mixture of the evil with the good,

though it be a dishonour to the Lord and an injury to His people. But appearances deceive, and absolute separateness is not found, and God uses the trial produced by it for blessing to those whose eye is single. But at His coming the severance will be complete, at His appearing it will be manifest. Hence, the resurrection of the sleeping saints is called a resurrection out of, or from among, the dead; which could not be said of the resurrection of the wicked, for they leave no more to be raised. Thus both classes are raised separately, and the traditional idea of one general resurrection of the dead is fictitious. Daniel 12 speaks of a resuscitation of Israel, Matthew 25 of the Lord's judgment of the nations: neither refers to the literally dead.

But the moral consequence of the error is as positively bad as the truth sanctifies. For the action of a general resurrection connects itself with a general judgment, and thus vagueness is brought in on the spirit of the believer, who loses thereby the truth of salvation as a present thing, and the consciousness of possessing eternal life in Christ, in contrast with coming into judgment. Compare Heb. 9:27, 28, and John 5:24. One of the enemy's main efforts is to annul this solemn difference: he would shake, if he could, the believer's enjoyment of God's grace in Christ; he would lull to a fatal calm the unbeliever, indifferent alike to his sins and the Saviour. The first resurrection of the saints, severed by at least a thousand years (Rev. 20) from that of the rest of the dead, the wicked who rise for judgment and the lake of fire, is the strongest possible disproof of the prevalent confusion, an immensely grave appeal to the conscience of the unbeliever a most cheering solace to those who are content to suffer with Christ meanwhile.

Further, it is unquestionable that death is in no way the believer's hope, but Christ's coming, when every effort and trace of death shall be effaced from the saints deceased, as well as the living Christians, who have mortality, as others, at work in them. Then shall it be swallowed up of life; for to receive them to Himself He comes, Who is the resurrection and the life. Thus the believer on Him, though dead, shall live; and the living believer on Him shall never die. Death is not the Bridegroom, but merely a servant (for all things are ours) for ushering us, absent from the body, to be present with the Lord. But here it is no mere individual going after dying to Him, but His coming, the Conqueror of death, for us all, whether sleeping or waking, that we may be changed into His glorious image even in the body.

But there is another, and in itself far more precious, privilege signalised here. "Thus shall we always be with Him." This last is the deepest joy of the separate state when a saint departs, then to be with Christ. So even was it with the dying but believing robber: Christ assured him that he was to be that day with Himself in Paradise. Only such a state was but intermediate and imperfect, however blessed. For it was not the body glorified; nor was it all the saints gathered. At His coming all will be complete and perfect for the heavenly family, "and so shall we ever be with the Lord." What can lack, or what be added, to such words of infinite and everlasting joy? "So then encourage one another with these words." The Holy Spirit says on this head no more. That which is perfect shall then be come.

1 Thessalonians 5.

From the special side of the Lord's coming which consummates His grace to those waiting for Him by their translation to His presence in the air, the apostle now turns to the more general fact of "the day", when he deals with the world according to the concurrent testimony of the Old Testament and of the New. The gathering of the saints to Himself, asleep or alive changed into the image of His glory, is a new revelation, and is introduced here as such. Not so the appearing or day of the Lord, which had formed the burden of many prophecies, and, I think we may say, of all the prophets since time began. For it is an epoch and indeed period second to none in manifest importance, affecting every creature in heaven and earth, and displaying the immense change which God will then bring to pass in honour of His Son according to His word from the beginning.

"But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need to be written to. For yourselves know thoroughly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief at night. When they are saying peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh on them as the pain on her that is 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; for ye all are sons of light and sons of day: we are not of night nor of darkness.

So, then, let us not sleep as [do] the rest, but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep by night, and they that ere drunk drink by night; but we being of day, let us be sober, putting on a breastplate of faith and love, and hope of salvation as helmet. Because God did

not appoint us unto wrath, but unto obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we may live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another, and edify each other, even as also ye do" (vers. 1-11).

It will be remarked that there is no mention, no mixing up, of "the times and the seasons" with the presence of the Lord to gather His own to Himself on high. This, our hope, is wholly apart from the defined periods of which prophecy treats. Here where "the day of the Lord" is in question, they are expressly brought forward; for that day is the most momentous event embraced within its scope. It is not improbable from 2 Thess. 2:5 that the apostle had already taught them of it orally, as he certainly did of antecedent circumstances. But it is not necessary to assume that he had taught them as much as could be known, nor even that he had ever by word of mouth gone into detail on the day of the Lord. There was really no need for this, because the Old Testament treats of no theme more largely and minutely. It was already, therefore, a matter of common and familiar knowledge among the saints. Yet the accuracy of their knowledge is here simply said of the sure and sudden and unwelcome coming of the day of the Lord. There was no need of writing anything now, for they knew perfectly that Jehovah's day so comes as a thief at night. The apostle may not have gone into particulars; but this great and solemn truth was part of their inward conscious assurance (vers. 1, 2.) They knew perfectly, not as some strangely say that the time of it is uncertain, but that its coming is certain, and no less terrible than unlooked for.

With this is contrasted the fatal self-deceiving security of men around them, of the world. "When they are saying

peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh on them, as the pain on her that is with child; and they shall in no wise escape" (ver. 3), In 2 Peter 3 it is rather such scoffing unbelief as is found among philosophers, who point to the substantial stability of all things visible in the midst of superficial change and development. Here it is rather inward quiet and outward exemption from danger, through confidence in the social and political state of mankind; yet not without uneasy qualms which betray the real unrest and underlying dread of those that know not God and His Christ. As it was with men when the flood came and swept away all those who despised God's warning by Noah; as it was when, after feebler and still briefer warning in the days of Lot, condign judgment fell on the polluted cities of the plain; so shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. Sudden destruction, indeed, impends on those who trust themselves and their own thoughts, rejecting the testimony of God. This is the judgment of the quick; and, it will be noticed, no trace accompanies it of a judgment of the dead nor yet of a burning up of the earth, however surely both are to follow in their own due season. It is the end of the age, but not of the world materially. As a snare shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of all the earth. And they shall in no wise escape, any more than the woman with child when her hour is come and the birth-pang is on her. It is unspiritual ignorance, not to say folly, to apply this to the destruction of Jerusalem or to death, as some have done and do. It is the day of the Lord yet to fall on the world.

The apostle, however, immediately and carefully declares how different is the lot of the faithful. "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should

overtake you as a thief; for ye all are sons of light and sons of day: we are not of night nor of darkness” (vers. 4, 5). He is not afraid that it would endanger the young believers in Thessalonica, or any others, to know how grace had distinguished them from the rest of mankind, his very aim here, as elsewhere, is to impress this distinction on them ineffaceably. He says, first, that they were not in darkness, that the day should surprise them as a thief; secondly, that they all were sons of light and sons of day. Not only were they unlike the world as in darkness and the objects of the Lord’s judgment, but positive sharers of divine nature and blessedness. Indeed, such is the peculiar being of God’s children generally, as he adds, “we are not of night nor of darkness.” We are of God, Who is light, and in Whom is no darkness at all.

But privilege known and enjoyed by the believer is the very hinge and incentive of responsibility; and so the apostle proceeds to exhort. “So then let us not sleep as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober” (ver. 6). If children of God, it is a deep spring of joy in Christ and of thanksgiving to our Father, but how instant and inalienable the call to walk according to the relationship! So here, if sons of light and of day, sleep — indifference to the will of the Lord — becomes us not, but watchfulness and sobriety, as those who derive their life from Him Who is the one true light, and will bring in the day, as free from excitement as from careless ease. The righteous shall then shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Then follows a brief but vivid picture of the slumbering world and of the wakeful Christian. “For those that sleep sleep by night, and those that are drunk drink by night;

but we, as being of day, let us be sober, putting on a breastplate of faith and love, and as helmet hope of salvation" (vers. 7, 8). Sleep suits the night, and so does excess: men naturally do in the dark what they would not like to do in the light. It is the common and undeniable practice of men which is thus brought before the mind. To what is the Christian exhorted? It is not exactly, as in the Authorised Version after the Vulgate, etc., "Let us who are of the day," which would require the article, but let us as being of day be sober, having put on a breastplate of faith and love, and hope of salvation as helmet.9 Thus the believer is called to be in arms as well as watchful and sober. But the arms here, as but young Christians were immediately addressed, are not offensive, but defensive only: the three characteristics of their life here below, faith, love, and hope. We have seen how they are used in chap. 1 of this Epistle; here they re-appear in the last. Indeed they cannot be absent if we would speak of the motive principles of Christ, whether in truth or in practice; and hence they are more or less prominent in all the apostolic writings.

It must be understood that "salvation" here is used in the final or complete sense when the body will share the application of that gracious power which has already dealt with the soul. The believer has already life everlasting and redemption in the Son of God, and thus receives the end of his faith, soul-salvation; he is therefore looking for the salvation of his body (Phil. 3:21) at Christ's coming as Saviour, who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory, according to the working of the power which He has even to subdue all things to Himself. "Because God

did not appoint us unto wrath, but unto obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep we should live together with Him." These are plain words which trace up to God the sovereign grace which distinguishes the saints from the world from first to last, and makes Christ and His death the turning-point of all blessing for those who look to Him, as His wrath abides on such as are not subject to His Son. As lawyers, however, are apt to find in the law more difficulties and stumbling-blocks and evasions than any other class, so do theologians in the written word, to the dishonour of God and the injury of all who confide in them. Could any minds save those perverted by systematic divinity have ever allowed so low a thought as that physical waking or sleeping was here meant? Yet Dr. Whitby did thus think; and even Calvin10 says that we might not unsuitably interpret it as meaning ordinary sleep and that it is doubtful what is now intended by sleeping and waking, for it might seem as if he meant life and death, and this meaning would be more complete. Assuredly this pious and learned man here gives a very uncertain sound with the trumpet. It were better to utter no opinion at all than to leave the reader under such a confusion of thoughts. But even this is not the lowest depth, for there have not been wanting men who wish the apostle to teach that the words bear the same ethical force in ver. 10 as in 6, 7! the necessary inference from which would be that, whether we be spiritually watchful or slothful, we shall alike enjoy the portion of everlasting blessedness together with Christ. Does not this sound uncommonly like moral indifferentism?

Dean Alford, to take a recent case, seems in no small strait as to all this in his remarks on the passage (iii. 278, 279, ed. iv.): “In what sense? surely not in an ethical sense, as above: for they who sleep will be overtaken by Him as a thief, and His day will be to them darkness, not light. If not in an ethical sense, it must be in that of living or dying, and the sense as Rom. 14:8. [For we cannot adopt the trifling sense given by Whitby, al., — ‘whether He come in the night, and so find us taking our natural rest, or in the day when we are waking.’] Thus understood, however, it will be at the expense of perspicacity, seeing that γρηγορεῖν and καθεύδειν have been used ethically throughout this passage. If we wish to preserve the uniformity of the metaphor, we may [though I am not satisfied with this] interpret in this sense: that our Lord died for us, that whether we watch [are of the number of the watchful, i.e. already Christians] or sleep [are of the number of the sleeping, i.e. unconverted] we should live, etc. Thus it would = ‘who died that all men might be saved:’ who came, not to call the righteous only, but sinners to life. There is to this interpretation the great objection that it confounds with the λοιποί, the ἡμᾶς who are definitely spoken of as set by God not to wrath but to περιποίησιν σωτηρίας. So that the sense live or die must, I think, be accepted, and the want of perspicuity with it.”

Of course Alford is right in accepting the sense of living or dying, but wrong and irreverent in imputing want of perspicuity to scripture. He saw Paul only not the Holy Ghost perfectly guiding and guarding him, in what is written. Apply the Dean’s reasoning to a kindred mode of speech in Matt. 8:21, 22 Was there want of perspicuity in the words of the Lord Jesus? or, in 1 Cor.

8, does the unexpected but striking turn given to the word “edified” = “emboldened” in ver. 10 destroy perspicuity? It really gives force in every instance: it is only men’s perception which is at fault, with the still worse fault of lack of faith in God’s word. If they felt their own shortcoming but owned the perfection of scripture, it would be the right attitude, and they would learn, instead of indulging an assumption which covers ignorance in themselves, injures others, and is a great disrespect to God. The verse is really the conclusion of the answer to the Thessalonian difficulty as to the dead, and the Holy Spirit seems to have boldly used the words γρ. and κ. ethically in 6 and 7, and metaphorically here, because He took for granted the mind of Christ in the saints, which could not misapprehend His different aims in the two cases. Christ died for us, that, whether alive or dead, we should live together with Him. It is living along with Him where He is and as He is, glorified on high. And as the apostle called on the saints in 1 Thess. 4:18 to comfort or encourage one another with these words he repeats it here in ver. 11, with the added call to edify one the other; for to know the solemn judgment to fall on the world in the day of the Lord should the more build up believers consoled and rejoicing in their own proper hope at His coming.

The apostle next turns to a need rarely if ever out of season among the faithful, even where the stream of faith and love is yet fresh and strong, the due recognition of those that labour and take the lead on the part of their brethren.

“Now we beseech you, brethren, to know those that labour among you and are over you in [the] Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them exceedingly in love

because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves" (vers. 12, 13).

It is commonly assumed that the persons indicated by these expressions of spiritual toil, admonition, or presidency, were bishops or presbyters. But this is to lose the special instruction and value of what is here urged; as it is an oversight of the apostolic order as presented in the scripture to take for granted that any were appointed in the Thessalonian assembly to the office of oversight during so brief a sojourn as the first visit, among converts, all of them as yet necessarily novices in the things of God, however bright, and fervent, and promising. To the careful reader of Acts 13, 14 no argument is needed to prove that it was on a second visit, unless the first were of long continuance, that the apostles appointed or chose for the disciples elders in every assembly. The wisdom of this, if not the necessity for it, will be evident to any sober mind that reflects, even if we had not the positive prohibition to Timothy of any such persons from such a function. (1 Tim. 3:6) For surely, whatever Popes may do, it would be harsh in the extreme to suppose that the apostle in his own choice of bishops neglected the principle which he so gravely charges on his true son in the faith.

Undoubtedly elders, or bishops, were to be honoured, especially those that laboured in word and teaching. (1 Tim. 5:17.) But the weighty lesson inculcated in the other scriptures we are considering is that, before there was such an official relationship, those who laboured among the saints, took the lead of them in the Lord, and admonished the saints, are held up by the apostle as entitled not only to recognition in their work, but to be regarded exceedingly in love on account of it. Very

probably they were just the persons suited for an apostle, or an apostolic delegate like Titus, to appoint as presbyters. But meanwhile, and independently, this established a most important principle, and quite as wholesome for the saints themselves as for those who had no external title as yet: nothing more than a spiritual gift exercised in faith and love, with the simple-hearted desire of the Lord's glory in the healthful, happy, and holy condition of their brethren.

Nor is this state of things among the Thessalonians at all an exceptional case; in other places we may see what is analogous. Thus, among the saints at Rome, where (so far as scripture teaches) no apostle had as yet sojourned, we find gifts which they are encouraged in the Epistle to exercise, teaching, exhorting, presiding or ruling, etc. Apostolic appointment they had not yet; and accordingly we hear of no such officers as bishops or deacons. But it is a mistake to infer from this that there were or could be none otherwise taking the lead; for Rom. 12 explicitly exhorts such persons to exercise their gift, even if they had no outward appointment.

Similarly in the Epistles to the church in Corinth we find no trace of elders — rather the proof that they did not yet exist there. For if they did, would it not be strange to ignore them in the absence of godly discipline as we see in 1 Cor. 5, 6, and in the presence of such disorder as there dishonoured the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11), not to speak of confusion in the assembly (1 Cor. 14), and heterodoxy germinating in their midst (1 Cor. 15)? If elders were not there, one could understand these evils laid directly at the door of the assembly without reference to any individuals appointed to rule. Their absence is readily accounted for: the Corinthian

assembly was still young, however vigorous. It was usual to appoint on a later visit those of the brethren in whom the Lord gave the apostles to descry fitting qualifications for the office of a bishop. Yet, meanwhile they were not destitute of those that devoted themselves, like the house of Stephanas to the service of the saints (1 Cor. 16:15, 16); and the apostle enjoins subjection to each and to every one joined in the work and labouring.

At Ephesus there were, as we know from Acts 20, elders or bishops; but this did not hinder the free action of those who were gifts from the Lord, whether pastors or others (Eph. 4), who might not have the local charge of elders. The same remark applies to Philippi, where express mention is made of bishops and deacons, but as there might be, and no doubt was, the exercise of gifts in teaching or presiding before such officials appeared, so there was nothing in their presence to hinder the liberty of the Spirit in the assembly. Compare also Col. 2:19 with Col. 4:17, Heb. 13:7, 17, 24. 1 Peter 4:11 illustrates and confirms the same principle: a golden one for us now, when we cannot have apostolic visits, or the then orderly appointment to local charge such as they were authorised to make. But we may and ought so much the more sedulously to own all that the Lord gives for the order and edifying of the assembly, as we hear the apostles exhorting the saints in so many places to do, where elders were not, and even where and when they were.

It might be asked if there was as yet no official nomination of the chiefs at Thessalonica, how were the saints to know the right persons to own, honour, and love as such? The answer is, that the Spirit of God would give this, if not with the intelligence and surely not with

the authority, of an apostle, but quite enough to guide the saints for all practical purposes. Therefore, says the apostle here, “We beseech you brethren, to know those that labour among you,” etc. Here was the warrant of the word; the Holy Spirit would do the rest, unless self-will and pride or envy hindered. Even so much service of devoted labour and lowly taking the lead and faithful admonition would make itself known in the conscience, as it would yet more readily to the heart if the saints walked with God. Yet this is so novel among Christians, that even devout scholars find very great difficulty in discovering the meaning of εἰδέναι, whereas its force here is its constant use. If the saints can know a brother to love him, so they can know those whom God uses for their blessing and guidance, and, if right themselves before Him, will respect them the more for not slurring over what is wrong, though a pain at the moment. “If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” You cannot love as here exhorted unless you know them, just as it is impossible to render brotherly love if we cannot tell who are our brethren.

To be at peace among ourselves is of great moment in order to such recognition as the recognition conduces to it. So it follows here.

But there is no countenance given to the unloving, careless thought that those who labour are to undertake the whole burden of the saints, especially that which draws on moral courage and patience. This is enjoined, not (as Chrysostom says here) on the rulers, but also on the brethren generally. “And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the disorderly, comfort the faint-hearted, support the weak, be long-suffering toward all” (ver. 14). Love alone can thus work, looking at the saints as they

are in God's sight, and grieved at the havoc Satan would make in that holy garden of the Lord, for whose will and glory love is jealous. Such is to be our way with our brethren.

Next follows a cluster of short pithy exhortations almost to the end, which deal first of all with our spirit or state personally; next in our more public walk.

"See that none render to anyone evil for evil, but always pursue that which is good one toward another, and toward all. Rejoice always; pray unceasingly; in everything give thanks, for this [is] God's will in Christ Jesus toward you. Quench not the Spirit; despise not prophecies; but prove all things; hold fast that which is good; abstain from every form of evil" (ver. 15-22).

Grace is the characteristic of the gospel; and as it is the spring in God Himself as shown in Christ so would He have it in His children, not human justice, for the just against the unjust, but unselfish love doing good to the evil and suffering evil from them. Thus would He have us to be not overcome of evil but to overcome evil with good. Such is Christianity in practice above heathenism and Judaism alike. Such is it one with another and toward all, and so Peter no less than Paul: "If when ye do well and suffer, ye shall take it patiently this is acceptable — grace — with God."

Nor should the Christian give an ill impression of his God and Father or of the portion he even now possesses in His grace, any more than of his prospects. With what joy the disciples returned even from their Master departing to heaven! And the Holy Spirit in due time came to make the joy unfailing. (John 4:14) What has there been since to dry up the spring? "Rejoice always."

But we are still in the body and in the world, as they were. Therefore is the word “pray unceasingly;” just as we see those who returned with great joy from Olivet, all with one accord continuing steadfastly in prayer with Mary the mother of Jesus, not yet the abomination of prayer to her or to His brethren. Yet this due expression of increasing dependence on God should never be without thanksgiving, but as we are in everything, which otherwise might make us anxious, by prayer and supplication to let our requests be made known to God (Phil. 4:6), so are we here exhorted to “give thanks in everything.” And as a constant spirit of thanksgiving is the very reverse of nature’s querulousness, because of manifold suffering and chagrin and disappointment, the apostle fortifies this call with a reason subjoined, “for this is God’s will in Christ Jesus toward you.” Otherwise it would soon in the declension of Christendom have been counted levity and presumption. How truly does the apostle say in his second Epistle, “all have not faith.”

Next we have terse but full exhortation as to our more public ways. It is not here the personal call of Eph. 4, “grieve not,” but “quench not the Spirit,” followed up by “despise not prophecies,” which serves to fix its true bearing. Both suppose the free action of the Holy Spirit in the assembly, where He must not be hindered in His general movement even by the least member of Christ, any more than despised in the highest form of dealing with souls, or “prophesying.” On the other hand the saints must not be imposed on by high or exclusive claims which are never needed by, and would be repulsive to, the truly spiritual. They were to prove all things, to hold fast the good, to abstain from every form

of evil. By εἶδος translated “appearance” in the Authorised Version, is really meant kind or form.

This brief but full exhortation is followed by a beautifully suited prayer. “Now the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit, and soul, and body be preserved entire without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful [is] He that calleth, who will also do [it]” (ver. 23, 24). Thus does the apostle commend his beloved children in the faith to the God of peace Himself, after so comprehensively urging their own responsibility; and this both generally and in detail. This is the reason of distinguishing the spirit, the soul, and the body, the entire man inner and outer, and even the inner divided into spirit and soul, that they might look for God to set them apart wholly, and every whit within as well as without to be preserved entire without blame at Christ’s coming.

It may be well to add that “the soul” is the seat of personality, “the spirit” is rather the expression of capacity. Hence the soul, with its affections, is the responsible “I;” as the spirit is that higher faculty capable of knowing God, but also of unutterable woe in the rejection of Him. The God of peace Himself claims and sanctifies us wholly. For this should we pray, as the apostle for the saints in Thessalonica, that they might be preserved entire blamelessly, and in every respect, at the coming of our Lord. And for our comfort he adds that, as He who calls us is faithful, so also He will accomplish His purpose. Peace with God, the peace of God, the God of peace; such is the order of the soul’s entrance into and experience of the blessing through our Lord Jesus, as the Holy Ghost is the person who effectuates this wonderful purpose of our Father

whether now in measure, or absolutely and perfectly at Christ's coming, a hope never separated in Scripture from any part of Christian life.

But there is another trait of that life to which the apostle invites the saints. "Brethren, pray for us." What grace! We can understand easily an Abraham praying for an Abimelech, and perhaps also a more faulty Abraham interceding for a faulty prince of the world who had done a wrong which he wist not fully. But how blessed that it is the privilege of the saints to pray for the most honoured servant of the Lord, and that he seeks and values their prayers! Then follows a warm expression of loving salutation to the brethren, to all the brethren.

But there is another word of marked significance introduced with peculiar solemnity. "I adjure you by the Lord that the letter be read to all the [holy]11 brethren." We may conceive how proper and necessary this was when the apostle sent out his first Epistle. It was a communication in the form of a letter, so characteristic of Christianity in its affectionate intimacy as well as in its simplicity. Depth of grace and truth it has in its nature, whatever the form in which it may be presented orally or in writing. But being a letter, and the first of the apostle's sending out, he will have the things he writes acknowledged as the commandments of the Lord, and read to all as concerning all in the Lord. For though he does not put forward his title of apostle, when he could only rejoice that its assertion was needless, he writes in the fullest consciousness of it (1 Thess. 2:6), and here implies its fullest authority, but withal would be in immediate contact with the least member of Christ's body, as he wishes finally that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ should be with them (ver. 28). It was

not that he suspected the integrity of those that were over them in the Lord, but that he would impress on all the saints the solemnity of a fresh inspired communication. And truly, the more we reflect on the gracious interest of God in thus drawing out the heart of the apostle, guided and filled with suited truth for His children, the more will our value rise for such unerring words of divine love.

1 “And,” omitted in Text. Rec., has the highest but not large authority.

2 The right reading is διότι, not διό of the Text. Rec., though the sense differs little.

3 “Christ” is added in the Text. Rec., but does not appear in the best MSS. and Versions.

4 Probably the various forms of the MSS. here are due to correctors who wishers to soften what they did not relish or understand. omits τὸν συνεργὸν ἡμῶν, B omits τοῦ Θεοῦ. The Clermont copy seems to have preserved the true text as given above, though some erroneously here as elsewhere, render it “fellow-worker with God.” Compare 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1. “Under God” may be a paraphrase, but seems in our tongue needed to guard from a mistake against which true knowledge of God and His word ought to have preserved souls. The Greek genitive admits of relations far wider than the English. It is a question of contextual requirement.

5 Text. Rec. omits this grave clause, so encouraging to those addressed. The authority for it is overwhelming.

6 Some copies insert τό, others omit τοῦ, contrary to the best authorities.

7 Even Dean Alford thinks δόντα was changed into διδόντα, or early ignorance may have done it undesignedly.

8 The oldest authorises have κοιμωμένων, the class of those that sleep, character, and not time, as in σωζόμενοι, ἁγιαζόμενοι, etc. Later but more numerous copies support κεκοιμημένων which is exactly right in 1 Cor. 15:20, but not required here.

9 It may be worth while here to remark that the reason for the anarthrous structure of the phraseology is not what Bishop Ellicott assigned following Winer's Greek New Testament Grammar, namely, that as well known terms they dispense with the article. Now there may be cases where with a connected word the phrase is virtually a proper name, which sufficiently designative to do without the article unless special reasons require it. But as a general rule the facts do not bear out the conclusion and the familiar words in question fall under the ordinary principle that when they are intended to present an object before the mind the article must be used; whereas it is dropped in order to characterise or predicate simply. The usage is not arbitrary nor careless, but correct in the New Testament and all exact writings. Sometimes the article might or might not be inserted, and both be true; but the force is never precisely the same.

10 "Dubium tamen est quid nunc per somnium et vigilias intelligat: videri enim posset vitam et mortem designare, et hic sensus esset plenior, quanquam de quotidiano somno non inepte etiam exponere liceat." Comm. in loco, Opera, vii. 418.)

11 Some have judged “holy” a gloss. For my own part, I venture to think it is as appropriate here as in Heb. 3:1, and can readily understand that its absence from “brethren” generally might induce scribes even in early days as in later to omit the term. This was the first letter addressed to the Gentile saints, as the Epistle to the Hebrews lays special emphasis on those of that nation who confessed Christ being now “holy brethren,” not such as were only Abraham’s seed according to the flesh.