Notes on 2 Thessalonians

William Kelly

Public domain. As published on plymouthbrethren.org.

Also online at https://plymouthbrethren.org/article/3495

KEE Ministry Library · Faithful Men
kee-ministry-library.netlify.app

2 Thessalonians

The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians 1.

The first Epistle to the Thessalonians dealt with a mistake of the saints there as to those who fall asleep in Christ. In their immature and absorbing occupation with the coming or presence of the Lord, they had too hastily affirmed that such saints as were not found alive and waiting for Him would lose their part, not of course in eternal life and salvation, but at that blessed moment of His advent. This error was dissipated, not only by bringing in the grand principle of a dead and risen Christ with whom we are associated, and of especial cheer to those who are put to sleep by Him, but by a special revelation which discloses the Lord descending to raise the dead in Christ, and change the believers surviving till His coming, in order to their all coming together along with Him.

In the second Epistle, the delusion which false teachers sought to foist on the saints, and even with the claim of the Spirit, and a pretended letter of the apostle, concerned the living whom the enemy endeavoured to shake and trouble under the apprehension of the presence of the day. All knew that the day of the Lord is to be ushered in by darkness and divine judgments, and these Satan sought to inflict on the saints so as to fill them with terror and distress. Clearly this is the natural expectation of a Jew, who even if he fully confided in the faithfulness of God, cannot but look for an awful season of tribulation and of judicial dealings to precede the

kingdom of glory for Israel on the earth. (Isa. 2 - 4:13; Jer. 30, Joel 2, 3. Amos 5; Zeph. 1 - 3). As the enemy is ever at work to draw back the heart of the Christian to the law, if he cannot entice him into lawlessness, so did he at Thessalonica, and ever since, put forth his wiles to judaise the hope, presenting the Lord as about to appear in judgment, instead of letting him rejoice in His coming as the Bridegroom for the bride. The deception is the more perilous, because the day of the Lord is a weighty truth in itself, and the revealed period of divine intervention and blessing for the ancient people of God. How the coming of the Saviour, for us who now believe and wait for Him from heaven, would fit in with the prophetic testimony, must have been as yet vague, for there was no written word to define the matter or solve the difficulty. Hence the importance of this fresh communication. For the question was raised by Satan's attempt to pervert the saints from the enjoyment of their own proper hope. They were agitated under the false alarm that the day was actually come. This more or less completely obscured from their eyes their bright and longing expectation of the Saviour's coming to receive them to Himself, and present them, perfectly like Him in glory, before the Father with exceeding joy.

As in the first Epistle, the apostle does not immediately grapple with the error, but prepares the hearts of the saints gradually and on all sides so as to clench the truth and exclude the error once it is exposed. This is the way of divine grace and wisdom; the heart is set right, and not the mere point of error or evil dealt with. The very snare is thus made the occasion of fresh and deeper blessing; and as all truth is consolidated, so the Lord is more enjoyed.

“Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the assembly of Thessalonians in God our Father and [the] Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace from God [the] Father and [the] Lord Jesus Christ.”

“We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, even as it is meet, because your faith increaseth exceedingly, and the love of each of you all toward one another aboundeth; so that we ourselves glory in you in the assemblies of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and the tribulations which ye are enduring” (ver. 1-4).

It is impossible to accept as sound and satisfactory Chrysostom’s remarks on the address to “the church” rather than to “the saints,” as in other epistles. (Field’s ed. v. 314, Oxon. 1855). It has nothing to do with comparative paucity of numbers, and their aggregation in a single company. For in no city perhaps were the saints more numerous than in Jerusalem, when we read of the church or assembly there (Acts 5:11; Acts 8:1; Acts 11:22; Acts 15:4, 22). A similar remark applies to Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, or to any other place where we know the numbers were great comparatively, and there might be, as in Jerusalem, not a few houses where the saints met to break bread, but all composed “the assembly” there. Never, in short, whatever the number do we in Scripture hear of “assemblies” in a city (as of a province), but always of “the assembly.” No doubt the apostle addresses those at Ephesus and Colosse and Philippi and Rome as “saints”, but this, because of the truth he was communicating by the Spirit of God, and not because of their greater numbers. In fact, we read of “the assembly in Ephesus” (Rev. 2:1) after his Epistle to “the saints” as well as before (Acts 20:17). Nobody can

deny that a long time had passed and the organisation was complete, when St. John wrote to “the assembly” there; and therefore Chrysostom’s reason is invalid. The true ground lies in the perfection of wisdom with which the Holy Spirit addresses according to the nature of that which He is making known.

Thus the apostle again associates with himself in the salutation those dear fellow-labourers whom the saints in Thessalonica knew already when the assembly was founded there: and he again characterises the assembly as in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: the one severing them from Gentiles, as the other from Jews. Indeed at bottom both contrasted them with both. For what did a Jew more than a Gentile know of such a new living, and intimate relationship with God as Father? And what knew a Gentile more than a Jew of a rejected but risen Lord and Saviour in heaven? “Our” is added here, as compared with the opening formula in the first Epistle. Is is not to rivet emphatically those saints, who, however well they walked in most respects, needed to be reminded more than ever of their common relationship with him who wrote, and with all saints, to Him whose grace is the source of all blessing?

Thanks as before he owns as due to God always for them, not simply because they were objects of His grace, but as was meet because their faith was greatly growing, and the love of each individually and of all mutually was abounding. This was much; but what of their joy of hope in the Holy Ghost? Of this he says nothing. And the absence is the more striking, because in the introduction to the first Epistle he had spoken of remembering without ceasing, not only their work of faith and labour of love, but also their patience of hope

in our Lord Jesus Christ. Here, to the close observer, there is an ominous silence on any such enduring constancy of hope. Yet there is nothing said to damp their hearts, but all he could say to encourage. The fact is that their hope of Christ was consciously but seriously undermined and clouded, not by undue excitement but by agitation and trouble of mind as if the awful day of the Lord were upon them. This brought in fear which darkened their experience of persecution and of outwardly trying circumstances, though the apostle could boast in them among the assemblies of God for their patience and faith in all their persecutions, and the tribulations they were sustaining.

But patience and faith need the power of hope to sustain in freshness. There will and must be a lack when Christ is not personally before the heart as One who may at any moment come to receive His own to Himself. But yet more, there cannot but be an exposure, as we shall find here, to the counter and disturbing influence of fear, which leaves the soul open to the positively delusive power of the enemy. Even in the first Epistle the apostle was not without apprehension on that side; and therefore did he send Timothy to establish them and comfort them concerning, their faith, that none might be moved by these afflictions; knowing as they did that hereunto we are appointed. For they had surely not forgotten that Paul, when with them, told them beforehand that we are to suffer affliction, even as, they knew full well, it came to pass. But this did not hinder, rather did it draw out, the solicitude of the apostle on their behalf, “lest by any means the tempter had tempted you, and our labour should be in vain” (1 Thess. 3:5).

For the enemy has, of course, no real good or blessing to hold out; but he can and does work most effectively through fear of evil, especially where the conscience is bad or gets troubled. Therein lies his great power in awakening terror, availing himself of God's own threatened judgments on a guilty world. He may deceive the unbeliever by flattering him with false peace and false hopes from this the believer is freed by the gospel, but if not filled with the hope of Christ, he might easily be distressed by the pressure and the variety and the continuance of affliction, especially if Satan got him under the fear that they were judicial inflictions from God on the world in which he was involved like others. Where the heart is kept in peace and confidence before God, the mind can judge soundly. Fear unnerves the soul that is occupied with painful circumstances and throws all into confusion; for God and the word of His grace no longer guide, in the calm trust of a love that never fails, and that gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle, on the contrary, would have them take fresh courage from all their persecutions and the afflictions they were enduring, as he lets them know that he himself was boasting in them on that very account. So he bade the Philippians at a later day be in nothing affrighted by the adversaries which is for such an evident token of perdition, as it is for the saints of salvation, and this from God; because it is a real privilege on the behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him but also to suffer for His sake. It is part of the great conflict ever raging between Satan and those who are of Christ. This the Thessalonians had to learn more perfectly; and we shall see in what follows how skilfully

the apostle sets their souls right on general grounds before he broaches the direct correction of the error in the second chapter.

It would seem that the Thessalonian saints had been engrossed with the day of the Lord, as indeed it occupies a large part, and is the grand issue, of Old Testament prophecy. If grace, righteousness, and blessing characterise that day, there can be no doubt that darkness, trouble, change and judgments beyond all previous experience are to usher it in. Hence the apostle felt the need of preparing the way, by a just determination of its true nature, for his correction of this special error foisted on them. This he proceeds to set before them that they might be clear in what was indisputable, and so the better able to judge the delusion.

Their endurance and faith in all their persecutions and the distresses they were then enduring had been already treated as, to him and those like-minded, an object of glorying in them among the assemblies of God. He adds now, “a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, to the end that ye be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which ye also suffer; if so be that it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to those who trouble you, and to you that are troubled rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to those that know not God and to those that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (ver. 5-8).

This moral dealing with their troubles was of the deepest moment. For even saints easily miss their way in

the prophetic word: but God abides and cannot deny Himself, as these saints ought not to have forgotten. Now they might be to the uttermost tried, and evil in unrighteousness, deceit, or oppression, might prosper for awhile; but even so the faithful are called to trust confidently and rejoice exceedingly, reaping better blessings far than if all ran smoothly as the heart could wish. But the righteous judgment of God is unshaken, and faith rests on it without wavering, but with a solemn sense of what is at hand for violence no less than corruption, and especially for the hatred which cannot endure the objects of God's love in an evil world, where they, however unwelcome, are seen as lights, holding forth the word of life, not overcome of evil but overcoming it with good, and so much the more intolerable to the evil heart of unbelief which either rejects God or departs from Him.

Does God then regard with indifference His children's persecutions and distresses? On the contrary their patience and faith in all they are enduring is a demonstration of the just judgment of God; who, if He tries the righteous, loves righteousness, beholds the upright, and will surely rain fire and brimstone and a tempest of burning on the wicked. If he sees mischief, it is to requite it with His own hand. But His children meanwhile are being disciplined in the ways of Christ; and as faith perseveres without a sign, it may be, so patience must have its perfect work, that they may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. And is it not well worth while? "To the end that ye be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which also ye suffer." So it is His good and holy will: through many tribulations we must enter into that kingdom. It was Christ's way, it is or

should be ours. In that day the darkness will pass for the world. All will be plain that is now obscure: uncertainty and complication will be no more. For us the darkness passes away and the true light now shines; and we who were once darkness are light in the Lord. Then for the world, and especially for that portion of it which is now darkest and most embittered, the light will have come and the glory of Jehovah be risen there.

But the very contrariety of the world now to God and to His children only the more proves that the righteous Lord will surely intervene and vindicate in that day all that looks tangled now. One understands easily that, if Satan is as God calls him the god of this age, it can only be in the age to come when the Lord Jesus governs publicly and in power, that as a rule the wicked shall be put down and the righteous prosper. The unbeliever is hardened at the sight of the just man perishing in his righteousness, and of a wicked man prolonging his life in his wickedness. The believer awaits the kingdom of God and suffers for its sake. “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” Unto the sons of God it is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him but to suffer for Him. When the day comes all will be changed.

“If so be [it is] a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to those that trouble you, and to you that are troubled rest with us.” This none can dispute who believes that God is, and that He is a rewarder of those that seek Him out, and an avenger of all wrong against God and man. He is now dealing in grace; in that day He will judge the habitable world (and the dead also in due time) in righteousness by the Man whom He hath

ordained; whereof He hath given assurance to all men in that He hath raised Him from the dead. In that day, as even a godly Jew did know, He will be merciful to His land and to His people, as surely as He will render vengeance to His enemies and reward those that hate Him. What then will be His attitude toward the persecutors of His children and to those of them who thus suffered? He will dispense to such as troubled them tribulation, and rest to His now troubled children — rest with Paul and His companions in loving service for their sakes.

The danger is of allowing in this day of grace a judicial spirit, and this not only in our own minds like the sons of Zebedee who would have called down fire from heaven to consume the adversaries, but also in our interpretation of God's dealings with others if not with ourselves. The apostle would have the saints bright in their severest troubles, joyfully anticipating the day of requital when the sufferings of the saints shall be swallowed up in the glorious rest of the saints, the rest of God we may add, while their troublers become the objects of His unsparing judgment. For it will be the day of God's righteous award, in reversal of this day when Satan blinds princes and peoples, as he did when they crucified the Lord of glory.

This being so, persecutions and trouble were no indications of the day of the Lord; rather were they proofs that that day had not yet dawned and that grace still calls and would arm the saints unto all endurance with joyfulness. How different it will be for saints and for sinners when that day of the Lord is really come! How solemn yet blessed the change when the wicked fall into the hands of the living God, who is not

unrighteous to forget the work of faith and the labour of love on the part of His children meanwhile called as they are to endure a great fight of afflictions!

For in that day of righteous judgment it will be a "revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with angels of His power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to those that know not God, and to those that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus."

It will be observed that not a word here hints that this is the moment when the Lord comes to gather the saints to Himself. It is not the action of sovereign grace which translates the saints waiting for Him to heaven, but the display of judicial righteousness by the Lord when He appears in glory. Then, and not till then, will be the day of divinely apportioned trouble to the troublers, and of rest to the troubled who suffered for Christ's sake and for righteousness. How unsuitable to be revealed "in flaming fire with angels of power" to receive unto Himself the children of God, His bride, and to present them with Himself in the Father's house!

Here it is a question of rendering vengeance, not to unbelievers distinguished by two marks, as Calvin says, but to two distinct objects of judgment, "to those that know not God," the Gentiles, described thus expressly in 1 Thess. 4:5, and in substance throughout Scripture; "and to those who obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus," as the Jews might well be regarded, who, outwardly owning the true God and boasting of His law, were now the most resolute, whether vehement or sullen, in disobeying the gospel.

God is never indifferent to good or evil, and His children learn this and bow to it in His word now knowing that, if

they suffer with Christ, they shall also reign together. Their adversaries despise, hate, and persecute His unwelcome witnesses of grace and truth, who seek to adorn the teaching of their Saviour God in all things. Is this day of grace to go on indefinitely? Not so; that day hastens when His judgment will be revealed. And as glory, honour, and peace will be the portion of every soul that does good, so tribulation and anguish upon every one that doeth evil, to Jew and Gentile, for there is no respect of persons: evil will be treated as nothing but evil, when the Lord arises to judge, and this in the most manifest way before the universe.

Hence the importance, not only that sovereign grace should take to heaven the saints that are awaiting Him, but that righteous judgment should be displayed at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with angels of His power in flaming fire. For the day will then have come to render vengeance to His and their enemies, whether they be Gentiles that know not God or they be Jews, who (if not so ignorant as the nations) cannot deny that they obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

As a man cannot shake off his responsibility according to what he once knew of God (Rom. 1:19-21) and his conscience also as well as the law (Rom. 2:12-15), so he must then be made to feel the guilt of his unbelief in his insubjection to God’s glad tidings concerning His Son. And this suitably comes into manifestation before the world when Christ is no longer hidden in God but revealed from heaven, in order to bring out and display the government of God in power and righteousness and peace; as all the prophets bore witness from early days, and now the New Testament (so-called) sets its seal to the Old.

Thus was the balance of truth readjusted in the souls of the Thessalonians, who had been led to fear that their grievous troubles were the beginning of the day of the Lord. They were now to learn that this could not possibly be true from the essential character of that day, as one of rest to the troubled saints and of retributive trouble to their foes. For as it will be the time of divine recompence, so infallibly the Judge of all the earth will do right. It is not that the saints might not individually go to be with Christ meanwhile, nor even that He might not previously come for our gathering together unto Him. But there will be no public display of their righteously awarded rest and of vengeance on their adversaries till He is revealed thus in flaming fire. Such is the solemn fact, and this the distinctive principle therein, and the result of the revelation of the Lord from heaven, as here made known to the agitated saints in Thessalonica. The apostle too knew what tribulation was, and looked for this rest with them, as they were entitled to expect it with him, in that day which was still before them all. But as yet he and they were exposed to pass through trouble, and their persecutors were for the present in honour and ease and power without God. In that day the tables will be turned, His friends at rest and His enemies in trouble. It will be the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven in judgment of the quick.

We have had the objects of the Lord’s dealing at His revelation from heaven; and they are clearly His enemies, in no way or degree His friends. It is His judgment of all the earth, Who cannot fail to do right. This is made yet more apparent by the solemn description which follows: — “Who (οἵτινες, men of the class which) shall pay as penalty everlasting destruction

from [the] presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints and to be wondered at in all that believed (because our testimony unto you was believed) in that day. Whereunto we also pray always for you, that our God may count you worthy of the calling and fulfil every good pleasure of goodness and work of faith with power; so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and [the] Lord Jesus Christ." (Ver. 9-12).

Present tribulation then through persecutors differs essentially from the trouble of that day, which shall fall not on saints but on those that hate and injure them. In that day their persecutors shall pay the penalty of everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. Like Matt. 25:31-46, it is not the great white throne judgment of the wicked dead; it is the judgment of the quick, yet is it final. Their perdition is irretrievable, being everlasting from His presence and from the glory of His power; the wicked here (like apostates in Israel, Dan. 12:2) are abandoned to shame and everlasting contempt.

On the other hand, the Lord shall have come at that time to be glorified in His saints and to be wondered at in all those that believed. Blessed prospect "in that day!" and comforting in this day for the Thessalonians to hear themselves included, among those to be thus a marvel to His praise, for this appears to be the gracious motive of the parenthesis, "because our testimony unto you was believed." The saints in Thessalonica might have erred as to the dead, and been misled as to the living; yet the apostle fails not to confirm their souls by the intimation that the divine testimony borne by himself and others

had not been in vain, but had really taken effect upon them.

The careful reader will observe that the Lord is not said in that day to come for the saints and receive them to Himself, and present them in the Father's house, as in John 14. Here He will have come to be glorified in them, and to be marvelled at in all those that believed. It is an evidently different and subsequent part of His advent: not the hidden scene, so near to the Lord's desire, that where He is, they also may be with Him, that they may behold His glory which the Father had given Him, but the outer display, Christ in them and the Father in Him, when they are in glory thus perfected in one. So we see in Rev. 21:23, 24. The world will then know thereby that the Father sent the Son and loved the saints, appearing with Him in glory, even as He loved Him. Compare John 17:22, 23. The translation of His saints to heaven is one thing; quite another and subsequent is their appearing with Him in glory and judgment of the world.

Further, it is interesting to notice the accuracy of the preterite "believed," instead of the "believe" of the Received Text, in verse 10. The former is not only the reading in the Complutensian edition, but that of all the uncials, almost all cursives, as well as the ancient versions and Fathers, unless a Latin copy or two. Erasmus seems to have misled Stephens, Beza, and others, and so our Authorised translators. No doubt the present is much the most frequent, but when the aorist occurs, there is always a special propriety as here. For the glorious display, which is predicated of the saints, refers with this reading expressly to the past believers' The importance of this becomes the more impressive, on our learning that the great harvest of blessing for man

on earth follows, He and the glorified reigning over the world, when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah (and of His glory, Hab. 2:14) as the waters cover the sea, Isa. 11:9. In that day it will be no longer a question of faith as now, and hence the monstrous error of the Peschito (not the Philoxenian) Syriac, etc., which connect the believing of “our testimony” with that day, and thus make it future, in Pat contradiction of the very Scripture before them. Whatever may be the dealings of grace in that day, the apostle carefully restricts the faith and the glorious reward here described to a reception of the testimony before the display of glory and of righteous judgment arrives.

Thus was the way gradually made plain for the more complete and decisive correction of the error which had been foisted in at Thessalonica. The true nature of God’s intervention has been cleared. That day will be characterised by the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of His power in flaming fire. This it would be hard for the most resolute spiritualiser to apply to any such providential events as were then in progress, of which the enemy was taking advantage to mislead the saints. Nor had men gone so far in those early days as in later, for such as Macknight to say, that, when the apostles wrote, there were four comings of Christ to happen — three of them figurative, but the fourth a real and personal appearing; that these different comings are frequently spoken of in Scripture; and that, although the coming of Christ to destroy Jerusalem (!), and to establish His everlasting kingdom! be represented by His apostles as then at hand, no passage from their writings can be produced in which His personal appearance to judge the world is said or

even insinuated to be at hand! The truth is that it is one and the same appearing of the Lord which shall overthrow the last head of Gentile power, destroy the man of sin, and display the saints in glory, as He will judge the world in righteousness in that day also. Nothing can be farther from the truth than that the Spirit does not speak of one and the same day, which is invariably declared to be at hand, not at a great distance. Moreover, the presence of the Lord to gather His own to be with Him on high is not separate from the various aspects of His appearing we have just enumerated, though necessarily anterior to them; for they follow Him out of heaven for that day and appear with Him in glory, instead of being just then caught up to meet Him. His coming for the saints is sovereign grace completing its work for us; His revelation from heaven is to render vengeance to His enemies and be glorified in His saints in the righteous and retributive government of that day.

Now the apostle lets the saints know his prayer for them, of course in view of their existing circumstances and need. “Whereunto we also pray always for you, that our God may count you worthy of the calling, and fulfil every good pleasure of goodness and work of faith in power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” He had already, while introducing the preliminary topic of their persecutions, sought to lift up their hearts by speaking of their endurance and faith in all such troubles. It was a manifest token of God’s righteous judgment to the end of their being counted worthy of His kingdom, for which they too suffered, as the apostle might well remind

them, instead of their tribulation being an indication that God's judgments were let loose upon them. So now he also prays always for them that God would count them worthy of the calling. Elsewhere we hear of "His" calling, and of "your" calling, and again of "the calling wherewith ye are called." Here it seems better to leave "the" in its own generality than to restrict it simply to "your."

The next clause is that He would bring to completion every good pleasure of goodness end work of faith in power. Certainly this could not be, if they were driven from their steadfastness by listening to the delusions of false teachers. Confidence in the Master's grace produces faithful service, and loves to own that, whatever purpose of goodness may be, whatever work of faith, it is only God that fulfils each and all in power; "so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." As He is not here in fact nor yet reigning over the universe, the name of our Lord, the revelation of Himself, is given us that it may in the power of the Spirit be glorified in us, as we serve the true God and await His Son from heaven. It is a question of keeping His word and not denying His name, whatever the difficulty or discouragements.

But the apostle adds, "and ye in him," for his eye was ever on the bright day, and he would have theirs drawn from their troubles, and every possible misconstruction of them, to that manifestation of the glory of His might and righteousness. For as surely as His name is glorified in the saints now, still more fully, yea absolutely, in that day shall they be glorified in Him, as He is in them (ver. 10). It is no mere iteration of the previous intimation of

the apostle, but fresh thoughts completing all, such as only the inspiring Spirit could furnish. To say “in it,” for “in Him,” would be havoc with the truth in general as well as the context; yet it has been said, doubtless through rage for novelty and lack of appreciating the truth. May we be kept walking firmly in the truth according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ, even as the apostle prayed for his dear Thessalonians. It is an admirable introduction, before directly touching the error by which they had been drawn aside from the freshness of hope into agitation and fear, the result of a misjudgment of the deep trials that were pressing on them.

It is needless to discuss here at length the true bearing of the last clause, which some, out of zeal for the divine glory of our Lord, would have to designate His person only: “of our God and Lord Jesus Christ.” But, though this be grammatically a quite possible construction, as it is dogmatically also true in itself, its contextual suitability is another matter. That one article in the singular rightly in Greek designates even distinct persons if the object be to express their union in a common category (as here in “grace”), ought to be known not only to scholars in general, but familiarly to all students of the later body of revelation in its original tongue. Supposing God the Father to be here meant, as well as the Lord Jesus Christ, the insertion of the Greek article was not required, though English needs “the” before Lord Jesus Christ. On the contrary, its insertion in Greek would have been an intrusive error, if both were expressly to be united in a common object; for the repeated article would have had for its effect to present the persons as separate agents rather than as joined.

And the nature of the case, as well as the clearly revealed truth of Scripture, shows abundantly that the joint agency of these blessed persons could not be, save in — that which lies behind all — the unity of the divine nature.

2 Thessalonians 2

The apostle now enters on the correction of the error which, as we shall see, false teachers had foisted in among the Thessalonians. It cannot be doubted that the early believers, whether those directly addressed or others elsewhere who received these epistles, understood and profited by the instruction conveyed. But it seems demonstrable that too soon afterwards the bare meaning of the apostle's words was lost, if we may judge from ancient versions and comments, and it is equally plain that modern translators and christian writers in general have not recovered its real scope till this day. In the verse before us, as is sometimes the case, the misunderstanding of a single word is the cause and proof of confusion prolific and irremediable For if Scripture, however unintentionally, be made to speak not alone ambiguously but in a way that misleads, the result, as far as it goes, is fatal. With the strongest desire to avoid exaggeration and, yet more, falsely accusing any soul, one is bound for the truth's sake to record the conviction that grave mischief is here done in the Revised Version, by the introduction of "touching" into their text, and "in behalf of" into their margin (2:1). It will be shown that neither suits the context. We are in no way limited to these reflections of the Greek, especially where connected with words of entreaty. The Authorised Version, in the main point before us, is

substantially better; yet the misrendering has been considered by not a few as a decided improvement: so thoroughly has the aim or argument of the apostle been for the most part misapprehended.

In a comparatively minor detail that follows in the verse, the Revisers have shown better scholarship; for neither “by” nor any substitute for it has a right to stand in the last clause. The structure of the phrase not only requires no such insertion but absolutely precludes and condemns any supplement of the kind. Christ’s coming and our gathering together unto Him are expressly bound together, as closely associated events of the deepest moment to the saints. The older translation shows that those responsible for it paid no heed to this, the unequivocal import of the construction, for they have, on the contrary, interpolated a word which however small, severs the objects, which the form of the original does and could not but intimate to be in the strictest union. The Revisers were therefore at liberty and indeed responsible as faithful translators to expunge the second “by.” They thereby represent the coming of the Lord Jesus and our gathering together unto Him as two parts of the joint idea brought before us by the Holy Spirit.

But the great question is, what is the real bearing in this connection, of that joint object before the reader? and what in particular is the true force of the preposition employed by the Spirit of God? The Authorised Version says “by,” the Revisers give “touching” in the text, and in the margin they add “Gr. in behalf of.” The usage of ὑπὲρ, if we come to facts even in the New Testament alone, is pretty wide; but the context as ever has immense and distinct and decisive control in helping us

to determine the intended import. There is the difficulty that ἐρωτᾶν ὑπέρ is only found here, whereas ἐπ. περί is of frequent occurrence and unquestioned meaning. Compare John 17 where it is found repeatedly, and can have but one force — to pray or make request for — in the sense of “touching” or “concerning.” Is it critical, or reasonable, that ἐπ. ὑπέρ should mean the same? It appears to me beyond doubt that it is not. The Revisers themselves give us not only “in behalf of” but “for the sake of,” or more briefly and far more commonly “for.” Now “in behalf of” renders no just sense in this context; but what of “for” i.e. “for the sake of?” “Now we beseech you, brethren, for (or, for the sake of) the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him,” etc.

Here we have a definite sense which fits in admirably with the connection. It is the bright object of hope and assured comfort, whereby the apostle besought the saints not to be distracted by the agitating apprehension, spread by false teachers, that the day of the Lord had actually dawned. flow far the Authorised translators may have so regarded the context, it is difficult to say; but the transition from “for the sake of,” or “for,” to “by reason of” or “by” is easy, and in this case might perhaps be allowed to approximate. Even Bishop Ellicott, who adopted “touching” for want of duly appreciating the contextual bearing if not necessity, admits that an adjurative meaning is grammatically tenable; and certain it is that, from the Vulgate to Erasmus, Zwingle, Calvin, Piscator, Beza, Estius, etc., a crowd of others hold to this as the true scope. Meyer first assumes that it is strange to the New Testament, and then argues against the reasonableness of the

apostle's choosing for the object of adjuration the very point he is going to instruct them on. But this is his own oversight. They are distinct and even contrasted objects.

I cannot but think therefore that, while the Authorised Version in substance gives the sense, the Revisers have missed it completely, and substituted a meaning which tends to obscure and falsify the passage. The adjurative force "by" with a verb of entreaty is known from the earliest extant remains of classical Greek; and none can deny that the force of a motive or a plea ("for the sake of" or "for") abode to the last, and is nowhere more usual than in the Hellenistic Greek of the New Testament. So rendered, the phrase runs consistently, and the argument or ground of entreaty yields a meaning in perfect accordance with the verse that follows, and the entire paragraph. The blessed hope of being caught up to the Lord at His coming or presence is a most intelligible preservative against the false and disquieting rumour that the day of His judgment of the earth had come. Everyone can understand when it is brought before him, that such a consolatory and transporting prospect, if always in view, is calculated to deliver from the agitation and fear created by the delusive cry that the terrible day of the Lord was there. And so the apostle conjures them, not by "the day of the Lord" concerning which he was about to teach them (as he had been laying a ground for it in the previous chapter), but by "His presence" to gather them to Himself above, which was full of joyful associations. The subject-matter he treats of is that "day," and very full of terror, especially when misrepresented by some at Thessalonica as actually set in.

But where is the propriety of the supposition that the apostle beseeches them touching the coming of the Lord and the gathering of the saints unto Him? The error was about “the day of the Lord.”

Did not the Revisers, like others who have thus translated the clause, assume that the presence (or coming) of our Lord is identical with His day, and render ὑπέρ here “touching,” either because they quite identified these events in their thoughts, or because they had no distinct notion of the context? Now if the coming of the Lord be treated as the same as His day, what is the sense of beseeching them touching the same matter as is denied to be then present? If the day of the Lord be a source of disquiet and awful anxiety, nothing can be more appropriate than to beg them, for the sake of their most longed-for blessing in hope, not to be troubled by the false teaching that the dreaded epoch was come. The two objects are contrasted as in 1 Thess. 4, 5.

Thus, it is quite incorrect that “the coming of the Lord and our gathering together unto Him” is the subject-matter either before or after the entreaty in the verses before us. The reader has only to examine the preceding chapter 1 in order to be satisfied that the apostle has been laying bare the character of the day of the Lord, when (not the hope of the saints shall be realised, but) the righteous judgment of God shall be manifested. It is for this last they are here exhorted to wait, in patience and faith enduring all present persecution and affliction; for then are the glorified saints to reign with Christ in the kingdom of God, for which they were yet suffering. Then, and not before, will God recompense affliction to those that afflict the saints, and to the afflicted saints

rest with Paul and his fellow-labourers. Neither will be when the saints are caught up to heaven, but when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with the angels of His power, rendering vengeance to those that know not God, and to those that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus. For then the day will have come for His and their enemies to suffer as punishment everlasting destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might, when He shall come, not to translate His saints to the Father's house, but to be glorified in them, and to be marvelled at in all those that believed, in that day, Such is the real matter in hand: not in a single phrase is it the coming of the Lord to have us changed into His glorious likeness and in the Father's presence, but our appearing with Him in glory to the confusion of His adversaries overthrown before the wondering world, the day of righteous award for both to God's glory. Hence, if the apostle had been beseeching the saints "touching" the subject in discussion, and as to which they needed rectification, it ought to have been the day of the Lord and of our reigning in the kingdom with Him. Those who so render appear to have confounded "the coming" with "the day" of the Lord; whereas the one is the comforting hope against the fear of the other.

Equally plain is the bearing of what follows. For the apostle tells the saints that the day, of which the misleaders had falsely spoken as actually there could not be, however men may beguile about it, except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed; and of course therefore the power or person that restrains meanwhile must à fortiori be gone out of the way. For the mystery of lawlessness already works; not yet is the lawless one revealed till the restraint is away.

Once it is, the full display of Satan's power takes its course in the revelation of the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the breath of His mouth, and bring to nought, not by His coming simply, but by "the manifestation of His coming." Here again it is "the day of the Lord," when righteous judgment deals publicly with friends and adversaries, and not His "coming" or presence, when He gathers His saints to Himself on high.

Can evidence then be asked more complete than what the context before and after furnishes, that the apostle beseeches the saints for (or by) their inspiriting hope, not to be upset in mind nor to be troubled about the day of the Lord as if there with its terrors? To beseech them touching that day, which he was going to paint in the most vivid colours, not to be uneasy as if it were now present is opposed to his words! as unlike the accustomed energy and precision of the apostle as can be conceived. He entreats by their hope against their fear.

That there is a marked distinction between the Lord's coming and His day respectively had already been laid before the Thessalonians in chapters 4 and 5 of the First Epistle. 1 Thess. 4:15-17 explicitly show us the character and circumstances, the aim and consequences, of the coming of our Lord Jesus when the saints, dead or living, are gathered unto Him; as 1 Thess. 5:1-3 plainly opens out the dread effect of that day when it overtakes the wicked. There is the strongest contrast between them, and not a word intimates that they occur at the same moment, though, no doubt, when the day arrives, it is still the coming of the Lord, and indeed not this only, "but the manifestation of His

coming," and therefore with the utmost suitability called His "day." On the other hand, neither here nor in any part of Scripture is there a trace of the saints being caught up to meet the Lord in His day; for this is a further and subsequent step of His presence, when it is not the consummation of His love to His own, but the outpouring of His just indignation on His enemies as well as the no less righteous display of His friends with Himself in the same glory.

The misleaders at Thessalonica were not so infatuated as to imagine that the Lord had come, and by His presence gathered to Himself on high all the saints, whether departed, or alive and waiting for Him. Even they never dreamt that He had descended into the air, and translated all the once suffering children of God to be with Him glorified in heaven. Since it was patent to all eyes that the saints in Thessalonica, and their brethren throughout the world, were still on earth, they could hold no such suicidal thought as that the deceased saints were already raised from their graves, and themselves were left behind. The truth is that they were not thinking about the Lord's presence: their delusion was not on this score at all, but about "the day of the Lord," as verse 2 makes clear and indisputable. They did conceive that His "day" was not merely "at hand," which is true, but "present," which is false. Identify "the coming" with "the day" of the Lord, and all is confusion; distinguishing between them, you forthwith receive light, and need put no strain on the words, which are instructive in proportion to the discernment of their exact force.

For the Authorised Version is here wholly astray and even inconsistent with its own rendering of every

occurrence of the word elsewhere. The reader can compare Rom. 8:38, 1 Cor. 3:22, 1 Cor. 7:26; Gal. 1:4; (2 Tim. 3:1;) and Heb. 9:9, which form the entire range of the word in the New Testament. Not only does it not convey “at hand” in any one of the other cases, but such a sense would be everywhere absurd and impossible. In the first two references “things present” (ἐνεστῶτα) are contrasted with “things to come.” This could not be if the word really bore the sense of “just coming, imminent or at hand.” So again in the third instance the distress was actually “present,” not merely threatening but already come. Just as evidently in the fourth it is “the present age, evil as it is,” ὁ αἰὼν οὗτος or ὁ νῦν αἰών as the apostle calls it in Rom. 12:2 and 1 Tim. 6:17, contrasted with “that” or “the coming age” (Luke 18:30; Luke 20:35; Heb. 6:5), which is the very reverse, being good, righteous, peaceful, and glorious. Nor should we wonder; since Satan shall no longer be the prince of the power of the air or god of the next age, as he is of this (2 Cor. 4:4), but cast out and restrained, while the Lord reigns in displayed power and glory, instead of being as now hid in God. So even the different and future form in 2 Tim. 3:1, ἐνστήσονται, does not mean that difficult or grievous times “impend,” but shall actually “come.” “Shall be soon coming” would altogether enfeeble the sense and ruin its force. Not otherwise is it with the last reference, where the meaning beyond controversy is “for the present time.” One can hardly conceive any reasonable man construing the phrase of the time soon to come or at hand. The future will be regulated on distinct principles, as to which Scripture is not silent.

Thus, on the ground of the New Testament usage, the weightiest help of all for our guidance in translating a

disputed word, there can be no hesitation that the Revised Version is justified, and the Authorised Version at fault, as to the very important word at the end of the verse, the hinge of all sound exposition of the passage. But what of its use in the Septuagint, of such approved and acknowledged value as being the Hellenistic forerunner of New Testament Greek? The first instance, which Tromm (Concord. Gr. lxx. Interp. i. 529) cites from Theodotion's version of Dan. 7:5, is a ridiculous blunder, εἰς καίρους ἐνεστάθη. The Aldine text was not so far wrong, yet reading εἰς μέρους which is hardly intelligible; and it has the same error as to the verb. The Complutensian gave it rightly, εἰς μέρος ἓν ἐστάθη as in the Alexandrian and Vatican MSS. The Chisian copy of the true Septuagint gives ἐπὶ τοῦ ἑνὸς πλευροῦ ἐστάθη. But this effaces the only instance save in the Apocryphal books; where Tromm gives 3 Esdras 5 72 [47], 9, 6; 1 Mac. xii. 44; 2 Mac. iii. 17, iv. 43; xii. 3, every one of which confirms the Revised Version in all respects, and the Authorised Version in every case save the unfounded "is at hand" before us, which means, and can only mean, "is present."

It may be added that the word, and in the perfect too, is used in ordinary classical authors precisely as in the New Testament. See Herod. i. 83, Isoc. 82 B; Polyb. i. 71, 4; Plut. Lucull. 13; Dem. 255, 10, cf. 274, 6. The three instances, like the rest cited by Deans Liddell and Scott, in their well-known Lexicon (Aristoph. Nub. 779, Isaeus 88. 40, Dem. 896, 29), are of the usual import not "imminent" but "present," actually begun, literally set in. In each the suit was already commenced, even if still pending. It is the same beyond doubt with ὁ νῦν ἐνεστηκῶς ἀγών, Lycurg, 148, 32; τοῦ ἐνεστ. μηνός,

Phil. apt Dem. 280. 12 means the present month, not one soon coming; and so does ἐνεστ. πόλεμος in Aesch. 35, 27. And χρόνος ἐν., means the present, not future tense; as τραύματα ἐν., Plat. Legg. 378 B, means wounds inflicted, not merely threatened; and τὰ ἐν., or ἐν πράγματα, Xen. Hell. 2. 1, 6; Polyb. 2. 26, 3, means present circumstances, in no case "at hand." Not any instance has been produced where the word in the perfect can be shown to mean a state of things not yet commenced. The sense then, in writings as well profane as sacred, is uniformly "present," not "at hand." The rendering was therefore inexcusable.

This may suffice in a well-grounded way to assure the reader that the error so unscrupulously taught by fanatics in Thessalonica was, not that the day is "at hand" (for the apostle himself taught this expressly in Rom. 13:1 2), but that it had "actually come." These mischievous men were probably of similar type as Hymenaeus and Philetus, "who concerning the truth erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some" (2 Tim. 2:18). The resurrection could be only thus explained away as accomplished, by reducing it allegorically to some spiritual privilege already received; as many writers, and even commentators, counted orthodox, have misinterpreted "the first resurrection" in Rev. 20. Some such attenuation by giving a present bearing is as easily understood, as of the day of the Lord, if not more so. For while that day can never be fulfilled in all its scope, till Jehovah executes judgment on the quick here below and brings in His own reign, when all things rejoice instead of groaning as now, yet judicial inflictions in God's ways on Israel or the heathen were designated by "that day"

in the Old Testament. Take Isaiah 3, 7, and still more evidently 13, and 19. For what can be clearer than that a then sweeping and exterminating judgment on a people and country, as of old on Babylon or on Egypt, is called the “day of the Lord” on them? Yet no doubt there remained momentous elements as yet unfulfilled which await “the day” in the fullest sense at the end of the age.

Joel 1, 2 may illustrate this same thing. The day of the Lord is similarly introduced and with similar characteristics. It is a day that comes as a destruction from the Almighty; a day of darkness and of gloominess; a day of cloud and of thick darkness; great and very terrible, and who can abide it? It is a day which, however it might fall on any in a measure through Medes or Persians, through Greeks or Romans, looks onward to its completeness at length, when the Lord rises up to shake not the earth only but also heaven. Compare Zeph. 1:7-18 with Zeph. 3:8-20, Zech. 12-14.

Now it is very intelligible that a misleader might avail himself of the germinant or partial application of the prophecies in ancient times to affirm that the sore troubles and persecution the Thessalonians then endured along with external distress and political convulsion, etc., indicated that day. It was not indeed Christ’s presence, nor were the saints translated to heaven, which twofold event could not of course be pretended in any way to have taken place; for it is here pleaded as a self-evident guard against the error in circulation, that the day of the Lord’s dealing with the living on earth had begun, and that the saints were involved in its terrors. So far in fact were any from so egregious a fancy as that Christ had come, that beyond controversy the apostle could entreat them by1 (or, for

the sake of) His presence and our gathering together unto Him, that they should not credit the alarming rumour that His day was there. That is, every believer in his senses was fully aware that Christ had not come, but was in heaven still, and that the saints were as yet on earth instead of being caught up to Him above. Therefore the apostle does make this a ground of appeal why they should not receive the mischievous report, no matter how strongly in appearance commended, that His day had actually dawned. Christ's presence and our gathering unto Him on high must precede that day. That on the one hand so great a joy, so bright a hope, was not the actual portion of the saints and that on the other (while Christ was still absent; they themselves and their brethren were as yet on earth, were obvious facts and irrefragable reasons why the day could not be come. The saints are to appear from heaven following Christ to bring in that day, See Rev. 17:14; Rev. 19:14. In order to this they must be translated there previously; and so we see them symbolised as in heaven from Rev. 4 and onward.

The phraseology too, if scrutinised, will be found consistent only with this view, irreconcilable with the popular confusion which clouds these verses. For the apostle beseeches the Thessalonians, as we have seen, "that ye be not quickly shaken in [lit. from your] minds2 nor yet troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by letter as from [lit. by] us, as that the day of the Lord is present." As it is an offence against every sound exegetical principle to imagine that "the coming of the Lord" in verse 1 differs from that which had been so distinctly revealed in the first Epistle (1 Thess. 4), so equally are we bound to interpret "the day of the Lord"

here with what was laid down in 1 Thess. 5. Providential or figurative applications are thus out of the question. The New Testament at least employs both terms in the full and final sense.

Those who in our day speak of a providential coming of the Lord are on the same ground with the fabulists of Thessalonica who insinuated a figurative day of the Lord with this difference (it is true) that the former apply that coming to the future, the latter to the time then present. Consistency of interpretation refutes both. A partial meaning of either term is excluded from these epistles, which in fairness cannot be allowed consistently to teach anything short of the complete events. The resurrection of the saints bound up with Christ's coming, and the awful depth and extent of the judgment to be executed on the apostate powers of evil and on all who, believing not the truth, had pleasure in unrighteousness, point unmistakably to the intervention of the Lord in person.

We are told by excellent and intelligent Christians that the apostle's object here was to calm down the too ardent or wild anticipation of the Lord's immediate return. But as to this the prevalent confusion meets us. It took a stirring form says its champion, in the Thessalonian church. Their inexperienced minds and warm hearts were plied with the thrilling proclamation that the day of Christ [rather, "of the Lord"] was at hand or imminent [not so, for ἐνέστηκεν never means this but "is present"]. Is it not passing strange that able Christian men, who differ widely as to Christ's advent and reign, should coalesce in an evident misapprehension of what the apostle does say and mean? He "fearlessly crushed"3 the delusion that the

day was come. He besought them, by (or, for the sake of) the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him, not to be troubled by that false alarm. This was a powerful motive against believing the dreaded day to have arrived: but how could such a hope disprove the view that the day was “at hand,” even if he did not himself so teach elsewhere? It is exactly a premillennialist who could most fully be expected to make or appreciate that entreaty. A post-millennialist does not even comprehend it as it stands, but instinctively slips off into false rendering and bad exegesis; and this from the necessity of a starting-point which effectually bars intelligence of the meaning. He therefore naturally and utterly mistakes both what the Thessalonians thought, and what the apostle says in opposition to their thought. Those alone are right who affirm that the apostle meant only to deny that the day of the Lord had begun or was actually present; and one may hope that the passage is on the way to be so understood, now that the Revisers have corrected this faulty verse.4 The “long and complicated series of events” to be developed, the very commencement of which was retarded by an obstacle then in being while the apostle wrote, was to crush, not the waiting for Christ’s coming as a proximate hope, but the false statement that the day of the Lord was there already. The designing men in question did not set themselves systematically to urge the nearness of His coming, which all the New Testament does; their pretension to spiritual inspiration, their solemn utterance, their forgery of a letter under Paul’s name, were all to give colour and currency to the wholly distinct and false insinuation that the day of the Lord was come then and there.

Hence it was not enthusiastic and feverish excitement associated with the expectation of Christ's coming and the fruition of the Christian's joy with Him in glory. It was the operation of dismay and terror, as if that day of unsparing judgment and of inevitable horror had set in on them. To be "shaken" from their [or, in] mind or "agitated" (σαλευθῆναι) is descriptive of the disquiet and perturbation caused by fear; still more plainly does it flow from the same source to be "frightened" or "troubled" (θροεῖσθαι), which (less, if possible, than s.) suits the impatient and impetuous enthusiasm of a wrongly excited hope. It is in a quite different connection that we read in the last chapter of disorderly brethren who did not work as became them: spurious hope might produce this result; but nothing of the kind is implied here in 2 Thess. 2.

It will be seen that all this warping of details, as well as misinterpretation as a whole, by men otherwise to be respected, turns on the erroneous assumption that the express subject of discourse is the second personal coming of our Lord; and that it is to guard against the notion that His personal coming was "at hand" or imminent. Not so: this is divine truth everywhere taught in the New Testament, and nowhere so constantly, clearly, and urgently as in these Epistles. The apostle is really exposing and uprooting the delusion that the day of the Lord was now present. Do those confusing expositors aver that the Thessalonian dealers in false alarm as to that day thought or pretended that the Lord Himself was come or present in power and glory? The fact is, that on the contrary the apostle begs the saints, by His coming which would gather them together to Him in perfect peace and endless joy, not to be troubled with

the deceptive cry that the day so awe-inspiring had begun. This cry is nowhere imputed to a misconstruction of the apostle's words in the first epistle. Even if we punctuate with Lachmann, and Theile, etc., or with Webster and Wilkinson, the only real meaning is the claim of a spirit of communication, oral ministry, and a letter, falsely attributed to the apostle. Of course it in no way emanated from really earnest Christians, but from fraudulent men who misled them. Tertullian and Chrysostom are right; Whitby, etc., quite wrong.

A Christian writer of late contends for a figurative sense here only to be given to the coming or presence of our Lord in verse 1, supplemented by verse 8; because, he rightly thinks, the destruction of Antichrist immediately precedes, not the eternal state, but the millennial reign. Hence, as he will not have the reign of our Lord to be personal, he construes His antecedent coming as a figure. Now the decisive answer is, not only that in other New Testament cases (and notably in these epistles, as he himself allows) the presence (παρουσία) of our Lord is invariably personal and in grace, and not merely providential and in judgment, but that His presence is inseparably joined to "our gathering together to Him." Will he venture to say that the translation of the saints to heaven is here ?figurative5 and why should both be literal in 1 Thess. 4 where they are also (though in another way) shown to be indissolubly bound as immediate cause and consequence? Such a figurative force given to our Lord's coming is overturned by our gathering together unto Him conjoined to it; as it would also nullify the apostle's appeal (grounded on that blessed hope not yet realised) against the imposture that the day of the Lord was come. The truth is that the

postmillennial coming is a myth, not less certainly than the Thessalonian delusion about the day; as is every form of the popular misinterpretation based on the false translation of these verses, especially of ἐνέστηκεν in verse 2. To argue on the π. of the man of sin in verse 9, as if it is assuredly to be impersonal, shows how prejudice can blind a usually vigorous reasoner to build one assumption on another, without one element of solid truth more than in the fabled piling of Ossa on Pelion. The coming of our Lord and our gathering to Him above, which all must have known to be yet future, is the motive to dispel the delusion that His day had arrived; and hence His coming is not identified with His day — the real subject in question (which would be senseless), but contra-distinguished from it. Never can there be an intelligent grasp of the apostle's reasoning, never a comprehensive view of the context, till this distinction is seized, an immense help to the understanding of other scriptures also.

It will have been observed that the subject-matter was no new revelation to the Thessalonians. It had particularly occupied the apostle's spirit when he had visited their city, not only in teaching the saints but even in the public preaching to the world. And his First Epistle had set out carefully for all the saints, asleep or alive, the circumstances, order, character, and issue of the Lord's "coming" (especially since some misapprehension had sprung up in their minds touching the deceased); as he had not kept back the solemn nature of the judgment awaiting men in their unbelief when His "day" comes suddenly upon them. He had now applied His coming in all its joyful associations to dispel the fresh and alarming error that the "day" had arrived

— an error for which its propagandists falsely alleged the highest authority, spirit, word, and letter even of the apostle himself. For it is sad to see that, when the truth is lost, those who depart from it are apt to be no longer truthful, and become the dupes of Satan by unscrupulous perversion to give currency to their error. But the apostle entreats the saints by Christ's coming and their consequent gathering unto Him on high not to be shaken or troubled by any such dream as that His day was come. They must be with Him before it, in order to appear with Him in glory when that day comes for the judgment of the quick. When men are saying Peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, so that they shall not escape. Nothing like this had happened as yet: rather the converse of trouble and persecution for the saints, and of ease for their troublers, which is to be exactly reversed when that day comes.

From verse 3 begins a new line of disproof, not a motive from their blessed hope, but a reason founded on the positive fact that the stupendous evil about to work in its successive steps must be developed and manifested in its last and ripened form, with which "the day of the Lord" is to deal according to the prophetic word.

"Let none deceive you in any way; because [it will not be] except the falling away shall have come first, and the man of sin6 be revealed, the son of perdition" (verse 3).

Not a hint drops as to "the coming of the Lord." Tyndale's Version of 1534 and Cranmer's of 1539 are therefore inexcusable in supplying the ellipse with the words, "for the Lord shall not come," etc. Wiclif and the Rhemish avoid the matter by their usual adherence to

the Vulgate, which literally reflects the incomplete structure of the Greek. The Geneva and Authorised Versions so far rightly cleave to “the day;” for it is a question of “the” day of the Lord. His “coming” is kept apart from these predicted enormities, which must surely be fulfilled, each in its season, but both before that “day” come, in which the Lord is to judge them. But there is a careful reserve as to His coming, which is kept outside prophetic times and seasons as a constant hope, having only been introduced as a motive why the saints should not lend an ear to the unfounded and absurd rumour, whatever the authority claimed for it, that “that day” had come already. The Lord at any rate had clearly not come: else the saints had been at once gathered unto Him above. Thus His presence indisputably was not yet a fact; and it would, not only when fulfilled, but if kept by faith steadily in view now, preserve them from those vain fables and fears. His coming, or presence, is not the accomplishment but precursor of the day of the Lord; His appearing does synchronise with that day.

But the saints were liable to be beguiled in other ways: hence the fresh warning, and the distinct instruction that the apostacy must come before that day, and the revelation of the man of sin. Let us consider both in the light of the word. They are assumed to be more or less known already. Scripture has furnished light as to both; and the apostle had not been silent as to either when personally with them.

Our Authorised translators have utterly weakened the sense by rendering ἡ ἀπ. “a” falling away. Beyond doubt it is “the apostacy,” and there is no ground whatever for depriving the phrase of its intentionally definite force. Nobody can pretend that it is abstract; and a quality

would not have the article in Greek more than in English, so that Archbishop Newcome was as wrong in the principle as in the particular case. In the New Testament the word occurs only in Acts 21:21, and there is anarthrous, which testifies to the emphasis here expressed. There however it means “apostacy” though not “the apostacy” as here. This is better than softening it to falling away or forsaking. A verbal form occurs in 1 Tim. 4:1, where “apostatise” should have been preserved both for the sake of consistency, and to maintain the definite expression of religious defection. For this it means, not corruption but abandonment, as politically it expresses revolt from authority. See the Septuagint for its use in both these ways.

Here then we have in this brief but expressive phrase the Holy Spirit’s expression of that state of things which must precede the day of the Lord. (1) The apostacy must come first; and (2) the man of sin must be revealed, the son of perdition.

(1) In 1 Tim. 4 it is only “some in later times” who apostatise from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience, etc. It is an ascetic departure from the faith in the pretension to superior sanctity, but real denial of God’s rights as Creator and grace as Saviour. In 2 Thess. 2 it is no such partial turning away, but the extreme and general defection from the gospel which will boldly issue in the abandonment of all revealed truth and of what may be called natural religion, the testimony to the Godhead in creation and man’s conscience. It is the revolt which the prophetic word declares shall characterise the end of this age, as is so largely and variedly revealed in the

Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets, in the Gospels, the Epistles, and the Revelation. Deut. 31, Deut. 32, Psalms 10 - 14, Isa. 65, Isa. 66, Dan. 7:8, 11, 25, Dan. 9:27, may suffice for the Old Testament. In the New one may cite Matt. 12:31, 32, 43-45, Luke 17:26-30, Luke 18:8, 2 Tim. 4:4, besides 2 Thess. 2, 2 Peter 3, Jude, and Revelation throughout. These Scriptures warrant the awful expectation that both Jews and Christians will abandon their profession of the truth for which they are respectively responsible, and God be left publicly and in general without a witness of His truth and glory here below, save in the confession of a persecuted remnant and in the execution of His solemn and ever deepening strokes of judgment.

Sad to say, the graver men among Jews and Mohammedans (probably instructed indirectly by Old Testament prophecy) allow more of the ruin here below and the approaching apostacy than many Christians do. Even the Mussulmans own that the Jews are for the mass to abandon the law, themselves the Koran, and the Christians the gospel, before God sends Jesus to judge the world. Certain Christians, misguided alas! by the infidel dream of progress, look for a gradual advance of Christendom to extend itself over all the world, if they do not, like some beguiled yet more by human vanity, expect a state of semi-perfection here below. Scripture however, though it proclaims the gospel of the kingdom, never admits for one moment a kingdom of the gospel, the common delusion of Papists and Protestants. The truth is, that Christendom returns rapidly to that pride, self-will, contempt of the truth and of real godliness, with moral degradation, which characterised the world before the gospel; and 2 Tim. 3 had already prepared us

for it. But “the apostacy” goes farther still and supposes the general renunciation of the public profession of the truth here below.

(2) Nor is this all; for the abandonment of the Christian faith leads to another and worse development of evil: the revelation of “the man of sin, the son of perdition.” He is to be the evident and personal contrast of Christ, the Man of righteousness, the Saviour of the lost. He will concentrate in himself the wickedness of man and the destructive power which Satan wields, the antagonist of the Lord in a fulness which Judas Iscariot had only in measure, though both are designated alike by the same tremendous name (John 17:12) which points to a doom most signal.

Of this personage also Scripture speaks in both the Old Testament and the New. Without citing types in the Law, there is a wicked one within (not merely an enemy outside) who is everywhere prominent in the Psalms. Isa. 11:4 (formally in view of the Holy Spirit in ver. 8 of our chapter) identifies him with the man of sin, and Isa. 30:33, Isa. 57:9, describe him as “the king,” the usurper of His throne whose right it is, Dan. 11:36-39 yet more fully. The Lord speaks of him in John 5:43, as the Epistles of John call him “the Antichrist,” and Rev. 13 “the second beast” from the earth, and “the false prophet” who in Rev. 19 perishes with the last head of the fourth empire revived, or first beast from the sea.

Apostate as he is, he none the less is a religious power, and is indeed such distinctively as compared with the then Emperor, the political head of the West, he in the East being the chief of religion. Though he is a king, his main and marked influence is not as a secular power but

in a religious way. None can doubt this who weighs the various passages of holy writ here brought together, or even this one capital revelation in our chapter. No doubt he is really as infidel as the secular power in the West, his wicked ally, but his characteristic is spiritual, backed by every sort of power and signs and wonders of falsehood according to the working of Satan, and by every sort of deceit of unrighteousness for them that perish.

It is notorious that unbelief has wrought in divers ways to divert this prophecy from its true object and real scope. Thus a little before and at and since the Reformation those who struggled against the papacy applied freely the man of sin to that corrupt hierarchy, as the later Greeks understood the apostacy of many oriental churches which fell into Islamism, and the man of sin to be Mohammed. So, when the French revolution broke out, and Napoleon Bonaparte rose on its fall, many applied the chapter to those stirring events, just as earlier men like Grotius, Wetstein, Whitby, etc., had applied it to the evils of the Jews and the destruction of their city and temple. But there remains the undeniable fact that the oldest extant interpretation, which survived for centuries among the ever darkening fathers Greek and Latin, recognised the yet future apostacy just before the close, and the personal Antichrist to be overthrown by the Lord Jesus returning for judgment. I attach no authority whatever to the statements of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus, of Tertullian and Lactantius. But even such as Jerome and Augustine, Cyril of Jerusalem and Chrysostom, held firmly to a personal Antichrist to be destroyed by Christ appearing from heaven. As an expositor no ancient writer excels the

eloquent Archbishop of Constantinople in simplicity and perhaps understanding of Scripture. Here is his comment on the verse before us: “Concerning the Antichrist, he discourses here and reveals great mysteries. What is the apostacy? Him he calls apostacy, as about to destroy many, and cause them to revolt so that, He says, if possible, the very elect should be stumbled. And he calls him man of sin; for he will work, and furnish others to work countless things dreadful. And he calls him son of perdition because of his being destroyed himself. Who is he then? Satan? By no means, but a man receiving all his energy; for he is a man.” (S. Io. Chrys. in loco, v. 465, 466, Field, Oxon. 1865.) This confusion of the apostacy with the man of sin is not intelligent; but the main statement is correct, and the personality of the Antichrist evident, as in the mind of the fathers generally.

Bellarmine and other Romish advocates (who would parry the application to the papacy by the argument that “the” man of sin, “the” son of perdition, etc., necessarily means an individual, not a succession or class) some excellent men of what is called the Protestant school essay to meet by quoting “the” priest, “the” king, etc., as sufficiently establishing a class, not an individual. But these are words of office, and so differ from the very definite and singular description in our chapter; and assuredly as “many antichrists” elsewhere, so “many deceivers,” cannot swamp the unity of “the deceiver and the antichrist” in 2 John. It is in vain also to urge “the one that hinders or restrains,” and “that which restrains” in our chapter, which may well be, and I believe is really, meant to express one who is both a person and a power, as may be shown in its place.

Now though it be true that “the king of the north” and “king of the south” are in Dan. 11 applied to several kings of Syria and of Egypt, yet is neither used vaguely for a line of kings there, as this argument would insinuate and require, but in each several instance circumstances are connected so as to mark off one king from another, and make every one individually recognisable. Next, after the full account of Antiochus Epiphanes from verses 21 to 32, closing with a transition (in 33-35) where we hear of neither the north nor the south, a break occurs which carries us down “to the time of the end.” Then with notable abruptness we are confronted from verse 36 with the king that shall do according to his will, etc. That is, the analogy of the chapter is dead against the desired succession or class; for, to warrant it in 36-39, a class ought to be intended in each of verses 5, 6, 7, and so on. But the truth is that each speaks of a distinct king of the south: in verse 5 meaning Ptolemy Soter; in 6 the daughter of Ptolemy Philadelphus; in 7 Ptolemy Euergetes. On the same principle which had applied uniformly elsewhere in the chapter, verses 36-39 ought to describe a single individual and not a class, even if a king of the north or of the south had been intended.

The fact is, however, that here “in the time of the end,” as the careful reader sees, culminates the main interest of all the previous series. Here we have a king characteristically different from all else, who becomes in a future day the object of attack to the king of the north and the king of the south “in the land,” i.e., of Palestine, which lies between them, and thus becomes in that day once more the battle-ground of nations. Hence what makes the point absolutely conclusive, this very king in

“the land” is described by the prophet in terms which the apostle so applies to the man of sin as to prove that they both mean the precisely same object; and this, not a succession of men, but a single individual, yet to appear and oppose the Lord Jesus, and to be destroyed by the manifestation of His coming. In this way light is cast mutually on these remarkable passages of Old and New Testament scripture; and certainly, if the reader of 2 Thessalonians derives help from comparing the Epistle with the prophecy, he who studies the bearing of Dan. 11:36-39 may and ought to receive yet fuller light from the later writing of the apostle here brought before us.

There is also a simple and complete answer to the unbelieving cavil of a late Oxford Essayist, to the effect that there is “not only minute description of Antiochus’ reign, but a stoppage of such description at the precise date 169 B.C.” For we are conducted step by step down to that which exactly gives the general description of the Jewish state, which will reappear at the time of the end. Then suddenly is brought before us, in that time of the end, a lawless king in Judea, setting himself up above every god, and speaking words against the God of gods; regarding neither Jehovah nor Messiah, yet, while magnifying himself above all, honouring a god of his own. Had there not been a stoppage at that point, the prophecy could not have been stamped with its actual perfection. The same Spirit gives minute predictions of contending Lagidae and Seleucidae for centuries after the prophet’s day (stopped at the only just point), and resumes with at least equal minuteness the solemn crisis in the land, and the kings of north and south once more joining in that strife, which only closes in the day of blessing for the land and the earth and for man to

God’s glory which shall not pass away. Are we content to become fools that we may be wise? “None of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.”

But there is further light from God cast on the man of sin, the son of perdition (ominous as are these indications of evil beyond precedent and measure), who is to be revealed before the day comes which is to be his destruction. “He that opposeth and exalteth himself exceedingly against every one called god, or object of veneration, so that he sitteth down in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (ver. 4). There is no sufficient warrant for the words “as God” in the Received Text as in our Authorised Version. They rather soften the force, where the true text leaves the assumption in its unmitigated arrogance.

Scripture in its various notices of this future head of evil brings into prominence different characteristics which are to meet in him distinctively. He is to come in his own name, the impersonation of self-sufficiency as of independence of God. This will suit the then spirit of the age. Men, the Jews in particular, will be ripe for it and hail it gladly. It will gratify and crown their selfishness. Of old they would not have the One Who came in His Father’s name. It was irksome to their proud hearts to see and hear One Who was here only to do the will of Him that sent Him, only to manifest the Father’s name, only to make known His love and glory. They admired a bold and free spirit, daring, and self-assertive, The lowly mind was as far from their ideal of man as abhorrent to them practically. “I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father hath taught Me, I speak these things.” Such servant-like humility and devotedness was hateful in their eyes, as it could only condemn their ways and

words. Had they known the glory of Him Who there spoke, that He was the Son, the Word, the Creator of all, it would have increased their amazement and forced them to own themselves at deadly issue with that only and true God, of Whose testimony they considered themselves the exclusive and faithful guardians. Faith in Christ would have broken them down in utter self-abasement and self-judgment; and they would have seen the Father, by and in the Son, wholly different from all their thoughts.

The Jews then, not only in Christ's day but since, "this generation," rejecting their Messiah, the Son of God come in the infinite humiliation of divine grace, were manifestly of the devil as father, not of Abraham whose seed they were, still less of God Whose name they claimed only for pride; and as they had no standing in the truth, so they were more and more developing into lawless violence like him who from the beginning was a murderer and a liar. By and by the Jews will take the farther step of receiving one to come in his own name, and this as their Messiah. This will be no doubt the depth of moral darkness, for Scripture is not silent as to the righteous and holy character of Jehovah's Anointed. Psalms 16, 22, 40, 69, 72, 75, 91, 101, 102; 132, 144-150; Prov. 8; Isa. 9, 11, 12, 25, 42, 49, 50, 52, 53, 59, 60, 61, 63 are ample testimonies from a small part of Scripture. Space fails merely to cite the barest references in the Old Testament to the moral perfectness of Jehovah-Messiah and His future reign. So that, as the Jews were without excuse when they failed to discern the true and divine Messiah, so will they be yet more (after rejecting Him) in receiving the full and final representative of selfishness, which Satan will

bring before them in the antichrist of the latter day. “Him,” said the Saviour, “ye will receive.” This awaits “the many” in the land, and the time hastens.

John brings out other features of their coming leader. “Who is the (not “a”) liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is the antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22). Here we learn that there are two steps: the denial of the Jewish confession that Jesus is the Christ or Messiah, which is the fatal unbelief of that nation; the denial of the Father and the Son, which is the equally fatal repudiation of the christian confession. The antichrist will be the chief outcome of the twofold blasphemous infidelity, the spirit of apostacy, not only among the Jews, but of Christendom. He will be the Head of both; and that the unbelieving Jews and Christians can and will have a common head is enough to show how complete must be the apostacy. The denial of the Father and the Son is the rejection of the fullest revelation of grace and truth from God to man, and this is now going on in Christendom, not ignorance only of such infinite love in the person of the Lord Jesus, but heart-opposition and unbelieving dislike and defamation. Into this outward professors are gradually falling from a mere creed-profession; from it nothing will truly preserve, but the living faith of God’s elect according to His power Who saved and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began — the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.

But the lie of Satan will go farther than the denial of that especial display of grace and truth, of the Father and the Son; for it will, as we have seen, reject even the

Messiahship of Jesus, and thus pave the way for that awful amalgam of unbelieving Jews and Christians who will accept the antichrist as their one head. “For many deceivers,” as John says in his Second Epistle, “are gone out into the world, those that confess not Jesus coming in flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.” If they refused the highest and deepest revelation, it might be supposed that they would allow the least. But no; the hour approaches when the work of deceivers will be complete, and Christendom, proud and effete, will fall under the power of the lie to the utmost, along with the blinded Jews. And this gives distinctness to the sitting in the temple of God spoken of in the end, and disposes of all need to soften it into any figure whatever. Where else would the apostate head of Jews and Christians sit but there?

Now the intimation in our chapter, if it convey not the personal depth and immense scope of John, gives particulars of the greatest weight and interest. The man of sin is further described as “he that opposeth and exalteth himself exceedingly against every one called god or object of veneration.” Here appears antagonism and arrogant self-exaltation against every divine or even reverent claim. How humbling and awful to know from God that such is to be the issue of not the law only but the gospel, in the hands of men prone and skilful to corrupt all, and to make of the best thing the worst corruption! The evil will not be only an apostate state, embracing all, even the most opposed, but it will have a head, and this a religious head.

There will be a worldly head also; and many have confounded the two, because they play each into the other’s hands. The political chief will own the religious

head, as the latter will uphold the former. Indeed they are so closely bound together in their policy and doings and issue, that one need not be surprised that in ancient as in modern times many have mixed them up, attributing to the one what is properly true of the other, an error equally true of historicalists as of futurists. Thus of old as now not a few think of the seven-headed and ten-horned beast out of the sea (Rev. 13:1-10, where they read of the man of sin); whereas in truth the second beast out of the earth, or the false prophet (Rev. 13. 11-18), is the evil power which is here before us. He imitates Christ's power as King and Prophet ("two horns like a lamb"); but his utterance is of Satan ("he spake as a dragon"), a quasi-religious or irreligious much more than a merely secular potentate. So the antichrist in 1 and 2 John is clearly he who supplants and denies the blessed One held out in hope throughout the Old Testament, and no less the same One revealed in the New Testament as already come to give communion with the Father and with Himself, the Son of the Father in truth and in love.

Here it is not otherwise: the antagonist of God stands before us, not the conqueror of kings or captains. He opposes and exalts himself exceedingly against every one called God or object of veneration. There is deliberate and unspeakable arrogance in putting down all rivalry, yet it is not the mere negation of God, but pretension in every shape, in order to deify self after the most open way and the most exorbitant degree. We see the first evil aim proposed to man by the serpent carried out at length defiantly, man taking the place of the only true God to the exclusion and denial of all above himself.

“So that he sitteth down in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

It will be observed that it is not in the sphere of the world, but “in the temple of God” that he is said to sit. This gives a peculiarly daring and awful character to the opposition and self-glorification of the man of sin. “The king of Babylon,” type of the last holder of the imperial power which began with that Gentile empire, said in his heart (as we are told in Isa. 14:13, 14), “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north, I will ascend above the heights of the north; I will be like the Most High.” This might seem so aspiring as to leave no room for a higher flight. But mount Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King, is not such an encroachment on divine prerogative as to sit in the sanctuary, showing himself that he is God. This audacious assumption is not that of the world-power or first beast, but of the second, when he takes the exclusive place of the God of Israel in His temple. A figurative sense of the church, as God’s habitation through the Spirit, is here out of the question. The revealed character of the person, and the antecedent apostacy, forbid any such application. It was in the temple of Jerusalem that the glory of God was once enthroned above the mercy-seat, it was in that temple that He Who will yet be the glory of Israel, and of the earth, as He is of heaven, presented Himself in grace and healed those blind and lame who were of old the hated of David’s soul.

There will this sad contrast of the man of righteousness and Saviour of the lost take his seat, not like God or “as God” (which words of the Received Text disappear as

wanting adequate authority), but showing himself that he is God. He is no vicar, nor earthly representative. He claims to be the true God of Israel, and this in His temple. It might seem past belief that any creature could so deceive himself, or at least hope to deceive others, into a pretension so egregiously profane and in a place so unspeakably aggravating his wickedness. But we must remember on the one hand that God will give up men in Christendom to a judicial blindness, and on the other that Satan will be permitted for a little to display his evil power unchecked. Of both the man of sin will avail himself to the uttermost; and one may conceive how the blessed truth of the Incarnate Word may be perverted to the damnable lie of Satan at the end of the age, and this in Jerusalem, where the latter glory of this house will be awaited, once more to surpass the former, by the same unbelieving generation which saw no beauty in the true Son of David why they should desire Him. Those who despised God become man are morally prepared in due time to adore man assuming to be God. Grace is hateful in their eyes, which greedily accept self-glorification. And if it be in general the hour of high looks and words of blasphemy, we can understand the power of darkness culminating in the chief who assumes supreme Godhead in God's temple.

Thus the man of sin is the unspeakably evil counterpart of the blessed Lord; Who, subsisting in the form of God, did not esteem it a matter of grasping (or robbery) to be on equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking a bondman's form, coming in likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, death of the cross. Wherefore also God exceedingly exalted Him — the very

word which the Spirit uses to describe the son of perdition in his self-inflation. God, on the contrary, highly exalted the Saviour, and gave Him the name that is above every name. Here we have two parts deeply distinguished: His emptying Himself as the divine Son, His humbling Himself as a man. Not that He ceased to be either. He was intrinsically and eternally God; it could therefore be no matter of seizing such dignity, as did in principle the first Adam, who was a mere man, and as this son of perdition will fully do in his own time to become the slave and dupe and victim of Satan, disobedient unto death, yea unto divine and eternal judgment, as antichrist is to be beyond doubt.

Indeed it is notable that our Lord, even when found in figure as a man, humbled Himself in becoming obedient as far as death, for it had no claim on Him Who knew no sin, had He not deigned to be the willing Victim, Whom God made sin for us, as He emptied Himself in taking a bondman's form. The highest creature, Michael, is but a servant, while the Son emptied Himself to become one. What a testimony to His deity! What a contrast with him who being the vilest of men vaunts himself God in the temple of God! What will this last and worst usurper be in the eyes of Him that blasts him with the breath of His lips, and consigns him to the lake of fire? For this impious adversary of the God of Israel (with all the deeper guilt of denying Him as alone fully revealed in the Son, as Christians know Him) it will be a question of the earth only. He denies the unseen and eternal: heaven is nothing to him any more than hell, and therefore he daringly assumes to be God on earth where the glory of Jehovah was once displayed. But he will be manifestly a man and not God when the Lord Jesus from

heaven smites him with the rod of His mouth; for then His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue as a devouring fire.

It appears from ver. 5 that the apostle had in no way kept back these solemn truths as to the apostacy and the man of sin during his first visit, to Thessalonica. Reserve is the reverse of the truth in Christianity, which if veiled is veiled in those that are lost, in whom the god of this world has blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving, that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ should not dawn on them. Reserve is the more strikingly false, as the time the apostle spent there was short, and the saints had been only just brought to God: yet did he not withhold either the coming of the Lord or His day when He introduces the kingdom, nor the awful defection from the gospel and the manifestation of the lawless one which His day is to judge.

“Remember ye not that, being yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know that which restraineth, that he may be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness already worketh: only [there is] one that restraineth now until he be out of the way” (ver. 5-7).

Had the Thessalonians only borne in mind the oral testimony, they would have resisted more effectually the inroad of error. But they, as we, should learn even from that failure the incalculable value of the written word. Even a primitive tradition is unreliable, and as it needs, so it receives, the correcting hand of the Holy Spirit. The inference from the Lord’s word in John 21:22 seemed to the early brethren inevitable; but the disciple whom Jesus loved lived long enough to prove inspiration by the

danger of inferential reasoning from an oral report, and the all-importance of the written word. How easy it is to let slip the words of the Lord, or what the apostle used to say!

There is no real ground of course for such a solecism as taking νῦν with τὸ κ. like Macknight and others. It is simply resumptive with καὶ, a particle of transition and not temporal, which is the less necessary as we have subsequently ὁ κατέχων ἄρτι. Even if "now" were used temporally as to the Thessalonians, it would not imply that there was a time coming when they would cease to know, which is ridiculous, but a contrast of present knowledge with past ignorance. And the logical force of the adverb here, as determined by the order of the words and the context or coherence, does not suppose, more than the false construction, any undue knowledge of God's ways by His saints.

But the apostle does not say that he when with them had explained the restraint of which he here speaks. They knew, he says, that there is that which restrains the revelation of the man of sin till the fit and destined moment come. That he had told them what it was is more than is intimated; and there is no reason therefore to suppose this an unwritten tradition. All he says is that the Thessalonians knew the fact, there he leaves it mysteriously for others, as it appears to me, with perfectly given wisdom from on high. For the form of the restraining power might change in God's providential government; and that which the Thessalonians knew as then standing in the way of the lawless one's manifestation might give place to another hindrance later. Thus other and better reasons might lead the apostle to be reticent, than the prudent fear which the

fathers imputed to him of offending the Roman Empire, the one barrier in the eyes of most. If the man of sin be not yet revealed, it is clear that the breaking up of the Empire then did not bring the antichrist, as Tertullian expected. Yet their idea is perhaps rather defective than false.

For the powers that be are ordained of God, and do act as a bulwark against that spirit of lawlessness to which the corruption of Christianity gives an immensely increased impetus. It matters not whether we look at the clerical party or the radical, they both help on self-will, and are each unfriendly to civil government when it opposes either. Outside both, yet in the bosom of Christendom, rise up ever increasing masses of men whom it would be unjust to class with either churchism or dissent; men perhaps baptised, certainly animated with hatred of all restraint, yet notwithstanding their religion or infidelity skilful and eager to avail themselves of Scriptural words, facts, and principles, in order to overthrow not only all recognition and honour of God, but all reality of human government. This is among the premonitions of the approaching apostacy, and the man of sin. But as yet there is “that which restraineth that he may be revealed in his own season.” God is meanwhile gathering out His children, the members of Christ’s body, as lie is sending His gospel to the ends of the earth.

The empire is gone; divided kingdoms of more or less constitutional character have followed the downfall of feudalism. The energy of the Spirit of God has wrought as yet, during each and all, to hinder the outbreak of the apostacy, and the manifestation of the lawless one before his appointed hour. But the Roman Empire is to

rise again, ordained of Satan, not of God; when its active re-existence will operate as the main support, and be the manifest sign, if sign be wanted, of antichrist in his opposition and self-exaltation against every one called god or object of veneration. The beast, or fourth empire revived, and the false prophet, as they work together in evil, so must both perish together, as Scripture plainly shows. The patristic scheme was therefore defective, to say the least.

It is quite erroneous to confound “the apostacy” with “the mystery of lawlessness.” The apostacy is future, and only just precedes the revelation of the man of sin, both of which must be before the day of the Lord. But here (ver. 7) we are expressly told that “the mystery of lawlessness doth already work.” The apostacy will be an open abandonment of all revelation, after that the coming and work of the Lord Jesus, and the consequent presence of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, had made divine truth manifest in the richest grace to man on earth. When the unfaithfulness of Christendom has corrupted the testimony and made, the church utterly and hopelessly despicable, to the shame of the Lord Jesus, men will rise up in rebellion, not merely against the faithless church, but yet more against the holy revelation itself, spurning God’s grace and hating the truth, and resolved on nothing so much as their own will and way. “The mystery of lawlessness” is the hidden energy of Satan meanwhile in mingling error with truth under Christ’s name, either swamping grace by legalism or prostituting it to licence. Even then this lawlessness was secretly at work in apostolic days, soon to rot inwardly and foul contagion spread, as we see in Acts 20:29, 30 in these Epistles, and almost all the others,

especially those called catholic, where the evil germinating from the first is no longer a matter of prediction, but of fact and denunciation in the darkest colours and the most solemn notes of sure judgment. It is lawlessness secretly at work, and so called its "mystery," in contrast with the revelation of the lawless one when the resisting power no longer acts, and his own season is arrived.

It is also a mistake ἀνομία, lawlessness, is never in the New Testament the condition of one living without law, but always the condition or deed of one who acts contrary to law; for this would be παρανομία (as the verb in Acts 23:3 and the noun in 2 Peter 2:16). The usual terms for such a violation or transgression of law is παράβασισ (Rom. 2:23; 4:13; 5:14 etc.) The truth is that ἀνομία is both a wider and deeper word, as we learn from 1 John 3:4, where the Revisers have at length vindicated the mind of God from the darkening cloud with which theology had too long veiled the truth. Sin is not transgression of law but lawlessness, and lawlessness is sin. It is a convertible or reciprocating proposition, the subject being identified with the predicate. Hence it is exactly where there is no law, that ἀνομία (properly speaking) is found. For, the apostle declares (Rom. 2), as many as sinned without law shall also perish without law, as many as sinned under law shall be judged by law. The Gentile was a sinner and lawless, the Jew a transgressor of the law. It is wholly to miss the truth therefore to say that the Gentiles sinning without law might be charged with sin, but could not be charged with ἀνομία. For this is precisely the designation of their state, and besides, as a universal principle, ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία. Had it been said

that they could not be truly called “transgressors,” it would have been correct. For where no law is neither is there transgression; but if there be sin as there is, there cannot but be lawlessness. Hence, says the apostle in 1 Cor. 9:20, 21, “To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to them under law, as under law, not being myself under law, that I might gain those under law; to those without law, as without law, not being without law to God but under law to Christ, that I might gain those without law.” Theology is but a blind guide in the truth of God.

How then comes “lawlessness” to be appropriate in this case? Just because it is the abuse of grace in Christendom. For every Christian ought to know himself dead with Christ, not to sin only but to law (Rom. 6, 7), but for this very reason sin not having dominion over him as under grace, not law. Flesh (man in his natural state) may profess the name of the Lord, but either would be justified by law and so is fallen away from grace, or avails itself licentiously of the notion of grace to live lawlessly. Thus the flesh, which used to oppose and persecute, learnt to corrupt and perverts the truth; as its idea of grace the is utter relaxation of law for self-indulgence or self-will. In those only who are in Christ Jesus, possessed of new life in Him and resting on His sacrifice for sin, is fulfilled the righteous import of the law, for they walk not according to flesh but according to Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4). Thus lawlessness had been from early days secretly working within the circle of christian profession, as it will be developed openly in the lawless one ere long, when as the gospel will be flouted as worse than heathenism, so the law will be discarded as putting an unworthy restraint on the will of man that

owns no superior on earth, and mocks at heaven and hell as being nowhere. Not “wickedness” or “iniquity,” or “unrighteousness,” still less “transgression of the law,” is the true reflection, but “lawlessness.”

The rendering of ver. 7 in the older English Versions is singularly perplexing.7 Wiclif simply reproduces the Vulgate’s error of “hold” twice, for “withhold” which both the Vulgate and Wiclif gave rightly in ver. 6. The Rhemish follows suite with its usual servility. I confess inability even to conjecture W. Tyndale’s meaning, if he meant what is printed, or to correct the misprint if he did not mean it. “For the mistery of that iniquity doeth he all readie worke which only loketh, untill it be taken out of the way.” (Ed. 1534.) That of Cranmer (1539) resembles the rendering of Alford and Ellicott, save that “only” with them precedes “until:” “tyll he which now only letteth be taken out of the waye.” Geneva led the way in substance for the Authorised Version, save that in both “taken” goes too far. “Till he withdraw” is perhaps unobjectionable, or “be out of the way.”

But this last and very important clause has of late been questioned, though happily by few. It might have been thought that the last words of ver. 7 were too plain to be misconstrued. Nor are they in any version at all known nor even in G. Wakefield’s, or in Gr. Penn’s. The Vulgate takes it, as all the English from Wiclif to the Revised, to indicate the removal of the restrainer, leaving (as the Bishop of Gloucester says) the manner of the removal wholly undefined. So does the Memphitic; so the Pesch. and the Philox. Syriac Versions; so the Arabic and the Aethiopic of Walton’s Polyglott. Alford and Meyer may be adventurous, but here abide with the unbroken column of translators everywhere. Here then is a bold

suggestion: “For the mystery of wickedness is already working (only there is at present one that restraineth) until it becomes developed out of the midst8” etc. That is, even when abandoning the old “holding fast” for the sense here intended of “restraint,” he dislocates the sentence in order to avoid the truth of its withdrawal, when it will no longer be the secret working of lawlessness as now, but the lawless one displayed, with whom the Lord Jesus will then deal. There is nothing, says he, in the words ἐκ μέσου to signify removal or taking away! which he argues is “derived entirely” from the connected ἁρτάζω, αἴρω, ἐξέρχ. (Acts 23 10; 1 Cor. 5:9; 2 Cor. 6:17); whereas γίν. has not at all the sense of removal, but rather of origin or of existence. Now, waiving the “half” in Thuc. iv. 133, and “in common” in Aristides ii. 120 (Jebb), Herodotus over and over again refutes the statement that it is only the connected verb that gives, though of course it may strengthen, the notion of keeping aloof or neutral, a wholly different idea from development (iii. 83, iv. 118, viii. 22, 73 twice). The most fanciful cannot attribute movement to ἔζεσθαι or καθῆσθαι, to sit or sit down; yet Wesseling, a competent scholar, properly interprets the phrase, secedere e medio. The truth is precisely opposed to this objector, for it is ἐκ τ. μ. which lends the force of secession to the verb. Compare Eur. Electra 797, where Paley takes ἐκ. μ. as meaning apart from the company, but probably it is abruptly or in the midst. Wetstein (ii. 311) long ago cited Anton. viii. 12, μικρὸν, καὶ τέθνηκα, καὶ πάντ᾽ ἐκ μέσου I am dead, and all gone. Let me add Dion C. who in his H. B. says of Lucullus (ea. Sturz, i. 188) that he kept aloof from both, ἐκ μέσου ἀμθοῖν, and similarly of others (i. 686, ii. 48, 768), save that in the last the connected word is ὄντας, which is akin to γίν. In

i. 388 Nepos is said to have withdrawn himself ἐκ τ. μ. away. Now we need not dwell on passages like that of Demosth. de Cor. (Reiske i. 323) where ἀνελόντας is connected with ἐκ μέσου, putting away," or laying aside, or again yet earlier, ἀν. ἐκ μ. in his Fourth Phil. (i. 141) "if we remove or take out of the way." But two passages of later Hellenistic Greek are the more decisive, as we have the precise phrase contested. Plutarch says of Timoleon (Ed. Bryan, ii. 109) ἔγνω ζῆν καθ᾽ ἑαυτὸν ἐκ μέσου γενόμενος, he decided to live by himself away from all. Achilles Tatius, ii. 27 (ea. Boden, 186) has τῆς Κλειοῦς ἐκ μέσου γενομένης, submota Clione, "if Clio be removed." Is it not plain then that the scholarship which could deny to ἐκ μ. γ. the force of removal is as bad as attributing the spurious sense of development to a phrase which never bears it in one single instance, nor I believe could bear it? The ordinary version is unquestionably correct.

Thus far was written when a third modification from the same source meets us, somewhat more sober, and mainly brought about by a passage in Aeschines' Epist. xii. (Reiske iii. 695), where is another instance, ἐκ μέσου γενομένων, referring to men dead or exiled. In either case they were "gone away." H. Stephens need not be summoned to inform us that γενόμενος cannot be rendered "taken away" (sublatus), though this sense he unhesitatingly gives to the whole phrase. Every scholar knows the wide range of meanings γ. derives from prepositional phrases attached to it as here. It is uncritical to cite texts like Ex. 24:16, and Deut. 18:18, in view of a wholly different construction. For in all the Septuagint appears no instance of the phrase used absolutely as here with γ. But even so, calling "out of the

midst" of the cloud, or raising up a Prophet "from among" (though here it is probably ἐκ only) Israel's brethren, is in no way development. Removal, destroying, taking, sending, or going out, are among the frequent associations in the Greek Bible.

Take however Amos 6:4 as one not so common, where it is a question of eating, and ἐκ represents "out of" and ἐκ μ. "out of the midst of." Development is never the connection there. Does it not then seem strange to extract that idea for the latter phrase from Matt. 21:19, Mark 1:11, Mark 9:7, Luke 3:22, Luke 9:25, Gal. 4:4, 1 Tim. 6:4, Heb. 9:3; when not one has ἐκ μ. γ. but γ. ἐκ which last nobody disputes may mean development? And why cite the identification by Hederich of ἐκ μ. γ. (at least in Eur. Iph. in Aul. 342) with ἐν μ., its regular inverse? It is hard to conceive, if it be not to bring doubt or darkness into the question. Even there is it not meant that A. would secure to himself the object of his ambition "apart from others"? In general the one means "in the way," etc., the other, "out of the way," etc., somewhat like the stronger ἐμποδών and ἐκποδών. That mind must be singularly constituted which could regard ἕζ. or καθέζ. in Herod. as giving the meaning of "secession"! quite as much as αἴρω in Col. 2:14 gives "removal." If the author had said "session," it would be true but irrelevant. But it is true that the idea of secession from party really does come from ἐκ μ. and not from the verbs, which mark inaction rather. The passage from Aeschines' supposititious letter must be added to those from Plutarch and Achilles Tatius, clearly proving that the secession implied in the phrase is intrinsic, not contextual, and due to ἐκ μ. rather than to

the associated verb, here the very same as in the clause in dispute.

Again, the inspiring Spirit had the best grounds for avoiding ἀρθῃ here, though Chrysostom, who applied it to the Roman empire, so paraphrases it; and he surely knew his own tongue. Besides, the preceding clause implies only a present constraint, so that its future withdrawal is the natural sequel; whereas the device of enclosing the central clause of verse 7 in parenthesis is not only harsh and uncalled for, but cuts the thread of the truth. And then, what an insignificant parenthesis when you have made it! If the Thessalonians knew that which restrains, did they not know that there is one restraining now? Tautology might be truly said to attach to the desired parenthesis. One would think that the mystery of lawlessness must have been "developed out of the midst," in order to be already at work. In short the idea is at all points unfounded.

The withdrawal of the obstacle, of Him who restrains, leaves the door open for the man of sin to make his appearance in Satan's power.

"And then shall be revealed the lawless one whom the Lord Jesus shall destroy with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of his coming" (ver. 8).

It will be no longer the mystery or secret of lawlessness, but his own time for the son of perdition to be revealed (ver. 6). The restrainer gone is the signal for the revelation of the lawless one. We are not here to look for the steps or stages by which he is led of Satan to his bad pre-eminence: this belongs rather to the details of the prophetic word, which is far from silent in the Old

Testament or in the New. Here it was of urgent moment for the young believers in Thessalonica to be delivered from the perturbation and even terror caused by the false gloss that the day of the Lord was actually come. The apostle was inspired of God to correct the error by casting a flood of light on that which still seems hidden from most, though clearly revealed in the instructive words of the Holy Spirit to the Thessalonians — the relation between the coming, and the day, of the Lord. So far are they from being identical or inseparable, though surely and nearly connected, that, wherever the popular confusion prevails, it renders the apostolic handling of the matter unintelligible, and Paul is made as vague in his argument as most of his commentators in expounding it. For if the coming and the day be practically the same thing, where is the propriety of the apostle's beseeching them for the sake of (or "by") the Lord's coming not to be troubled by the cry that His day has arrived? The balance, beauty, and force of truth are restored when we know that he entreats them, for their blessed hope which was surely future, not to be alarmed as if the dreaded day which follows it were come; and then he proceeds to show (that not Christ, but) that day with its judicial terrors could not come till the evil, now veiled and as to its worst development suppressed, break out fully into its most audacious contempt and lawless defiance of God. When, by the departure of the actual and mighty hindrance, it shall reach this climax in the assumption of supreme divine honour here below, the Lord Jesus as it were accepts the challenge, and displays Himself to the destruction of His enemy. This will be "the day" not the coming or presence merely, but the manifestation of His presence, or His appearing.

Hence the reader will do well to take note of the striking precision in the inspired language, and of the marked change from verse 1 to verse 8. It is not that a mere dealing in providence can be seriously entertained as the sense of verse 7. “The coming of the Lord” is demonstrably His personal presence, in ver. 1. inseparably bound up with the gathering to Himself of the saints deceased or then alive. It is now admitted by all expositors of the least weight, however opposed to premillennialism that the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ here spoken of can admit of no figurative or secondary sense, but points simply, unmistakably, and exclusively to His future advent in person. This clears away at once the darkening cloud of praeterists such as Grotius Wetstein, Hammond, Whitby, le Clerc, Schottgen Hardouin, etc., who, though differing in details, agreed in interpreting the Lord’s coming of Jerusalem’s destruction.

It is well known that the late G. S. Faber in his Sacred Calendar of Prophecy (iii. 434, etc.) sets himself to disprove what he calls the identicality of the coming of Christ in the two Epistles. He allowed of course, as all must, that in 1 Thess. 4:11-18 it is Christ’s personal advent from heaven; but he denied that there is anything that can warrant the thought that St. Paul in the second Epistle refers to the advent which he had mentioned in the first Epistle! He reasoned on the spurious letter as the sole source of any speedy expectation of Christ! But he really overlooked the egregious violence of his own assumption. For the first Epistle gave no little light from God, both as to Christ’s coming for the joy of the saints (1 Thess. 4:13-18), and as to His day for the surprise and judicial destruction of

the world (1 Thess. 5:1-3). How unnatural to suppose a change of meaning for either in the second Epistle! For these are the very topics which he resumes in exposing the fraud of false teachers. How monstrous to suppose them used in any other sense than in the First! Such inconsistency would be unworthy of a human author, still less of inspiration.

The truth is that the apostle applies them with fresh light to expose the imposture of those who in that spurious letter misused the day as if already come (in some figurative way doubtless), so as to alarm all who heeded them. And most strengthening it is to see, after explaining in chap. 1 that the revelation of the Lord in that day will be to the punishment of His foes and the display of His friends in glory with Himself, he beseeches them by (or for the sake of) His coming, which is to gather all the saints to be with Him on high, not to credit the false rumour that His day had arrived below, adding the most solemn changes and developed evils, which must be (not before His “coming” but) before “the day” which is to judge those evils.

How can any unbiassed person fail to see that His coming in 2 Thess. 2:1 is self-evidently identical with the same terms in 1 Thess. 4? The spurious epistle made out that the day of the Lord was present. The apostle first appeals (verses 1, 2) to the necessary translation of the saints to Christ at His coming as refuting this; and then he shows (verses 3 et seqq.) what appalling events must come to pass before that day, not only the utter and general renunciation of Christianity, but the open antagonism of the man of sin to God. For, as he explains, it is secret lawlessness which already works, kept down for the present by God’s power whilst He is calling out

His own for heaven; once the restraint is withdrawn, the revelation of the lawless one follows, and the Lord shines forth from heaven in overwhelming judgment.

Dr. D. Brown differs, but is no less unsatisfactory. For he separates verse 8 from verse 1, argues from such scriptures as Isa. 13:6-19, Isa. 19:1, Isa. 30:97-33, Micah 1:3-5, Joel 2:30, 31, compared with Acts 2:16-20, Matt. 10:23, Rev. 3:3, that “a bright coming of Christ” (!) to destroy the Antichristian power points to a figurative providential coming, rather than to His personal advent.

The great defect in both is the common fault from early days to our own times. Neither Mr. F. nor Dr. B. understood the precise nature of the error combated, nor consequently the real correction of the Holy Spirit. Both imagined, as one of them expressly says, that the time of Christ’s personal advent was what excited and unsettled the Thessalonians. But it is not so: they were shaken and troubled by the pretence that (not His advent but) His day was come, which delusion could only have been by insinuating some such figurative notion of that day as Dr. B. pleads for. The apostle dispels it by recalling them to their bright hope of Christ’s personal coming to gather His own to Himself, which all know is not yet the fact: a connection and motive quite lost sight of by both to the ruin of the apostle’s reasoning, and to the obscuring of the truth in question. To confound two objects, not only distinct but in contrast, is the surest way to spoil the proper character of each The day of the Lord is a further step of His advent, not merely His coming, but the appearing or manifestation of His coming, as the phrase in verse 8 really means. This would naturally admit of a striking difference. His presence to gather His own to Himself is

never so called. He comes to translate the saints dead or living to heaven. Here it is not merely His coming, but the appearing or manifestation of it which destroys the lawless one. The last is, or coalesces with, His day; which therefore could not be, till the lawlessness that brings down the swift and final judgment of the Lord is fully revealed. “A bright coming” is weak and vague, though no one doubts its awful and penetrating brightness. Probably “illustratione” in the Vulgate helped on looseness of interpretation, which first found expression in Wiclif and last in the Authorised Version, all the intervening English versions being correct like the Revised Version.

We are told that the one object of the apostle expressed by himself as plainly as possible was to dissipate the notion that “the day of Christ was at hand” or “imminent.” Strange mistake, we must repeat, on the part of scholars — hardly possible if they were not also held in the meshes of tradition. It was really to deliver from the false cry that the day of the Lord “was actually there.” The errorists said nothing about the Lord’s coming to gather the saints on high. The apostle first beseeches them by it not to believe so unfounded a rumour. Then he tells them of what must be, not before the Lord’s coming, but before the manifestation of it in judgment of antichrist. The subject in discussion is not His coming, but His day; and the light given on what must be developed before that day (not before His coming) is a most necessary part of the truth revealed in order to disabuse them thoroughly.

There is another impression which has to be guarded against in much that is taught about His day. Who has not heard of the effort to persuade souls that the

destructive judgment of the lawless one is to be gradual rather than immediate, the result of many blows rather than of one? Hence stress is laid on “consume “9as well as “destroy” in Dan. 2:44, Dan. 7:26, and here also in our verse, as indicating the successive steps by which the extermination of the antichrist is to be effected. And Macknight, like others, tells us that by “spirit, or breath, of His mouth” are predicted the preaching of true doctrine, and its efficacy in destroying the man of sin. Now one has only to compare Isa. 30:33 with Isa. 11:4 to expose the unsoundness of such an explanation. The gospel, the truth preached, is in no way like “a stream of brimstone,” as the prophet explains himself; and smiting the earth or slaying the lawless one is not Christ’s speech in the scriptures nor is it a mere “rendering ineffectual the vile arts of a corrupt priesthood.” It is instant and extreme judgment executed by the Lord in person; the truth of which is confirmed, if anything were needed to confirm it, not only by the explicit phrase, “manifestation of His coming,” but by the critical addition of “Jesus,” the Lord Jesus, on the authority of A Dp.m. Ep.m. FGLcorr. P, some cursives, all the ancient versions, and abundant early citations.

The importance of all this is that, if it be, as we are assured, the same coming of the Lord throughout both Epistles, followed by the further stage of its “manifestation” or that “day,” there is no room for the kingdom or millennial reign till after the Lord comes and executes judgment on the quick. “When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” Then follows that blessed period, to His glory alone, and not to the praise of poor fallen Christendom as it fondly dreams; an unworthy hope, the

bride reigning without the Bridegroom! What so distasteful to a true spouse who derived all from Him?

For the scope of the context is as conclusive as it is plain. The hope of the saints is kept distinct from prophecy. The coming of the Lord, which is to gather us to Himself, is not mixed up with His day, but a motive for the heart against the delusion that the day was come, as some alleged. No one pretended or believed that the Lord had come, nor that the saints were translated to Him on high which nevertheless must be before His day dawns for the destruction of His enemies. Of His coming neither the misteachers nor the mistaught had ever thought till the apostle recalled the saints to this their hope, in order to dispel the error about His day. Meanwhile lawlessness works secretly to corrupt the testimony of God's grace and truth; and more than this Satan cannot yet do, because there is One that restrains till He withdraw, when the apostacy shall come and the lawless one be then revealed, not before. His defiant opposition to God, usurping His glory in His temple, is the signal for the Lord Jesus in person to destroy him with the breath of His mouth and to annul him by the manifestation of His presence. So perverse are men that here (ver. 8) where publicity of judicial intervention is most emphatically expressed, they are ready to conceive of secret providence; whilst in verse 1, where not a word implies manifestation, they will not hear of aught else. His coming gathers the saints to Himself, the manifestation or appearing of His coming it is which makes an end of the lawless one. The saints are with Him and come from heaven for that judgment, as we may see in Rev. 17:14, Rev. 19:14; they had been caught up to heaven at His coming before the day. The

distinction is as clear as it is important; the Revelation as a whole can scarcely be understood without it; as the future is otherwise vague indeed, and mistranslation follows with false interpretation in its train.

The connection excludes all room for an intervening millennium. The mystery of lawlessness is distinctly shown to have been even then at work, and to pursue its corrupting course, till the apostacy comes, and the man of sin be revealed; the very reverse of a reign of righteousness on the earth for ever so short a while, much less for a time so considerable. There is an evident and solemn link between the secret energy of lawlessness that wrought ruin from the apostolic days, till (the restraint being gone) it merges in the lawless one whom the Lord destroys by the manifestation of His coming. All scripture points to, and is alone consistent with, the appearing of the Lord, as the necessary means, on the one hand, of divine judgment in destroying those that destroy the earth, and on the other of rewarding the suffering saints, as well as blessing the world, especially His ancient people at the head of all the nations.

It will be the administration of the fulness of times, when God shall gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him in Whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will, that we should be to the praise of His glory who first trusted in Christ. It is neither the present age, nor is it eternity, but the age to come, when the glorified Son of man with His heavenly Eve shall have dominion visibly over the subjected universe of God. Of this, His present exaltation (when we see not yet all

things put under Him) is the pledge, as the Holy Ghost given is its earnest to the joint-heirs. For while He shall inherit all things, according to the glory of His person and His rights as well by creation as by redemption, there is an especial fitness, that over the earth, which cast Him out when He came down in infinite love, He should reign in power and glory, all kings falling down before Him, and all nations serving Him. But this state of things is as distinct from the present as from eternity; yet, as it has never been accomplished, so it surely must be, for the mouth of Jehovah has spoken it, and it is due to His Anointed.

It is hardly conceivable then to find language more explicitly opposed to the notion of mere providential instrumentality or of covert judgments than the words we have just had to weigh. “The spirit of his mouth” is expressive of the inner energy of divine power (whether creative, Ps. 33:6, or judicial, 2 Sam. 22:16, Job 4:9, Ps. 18:15, Isa. 11:4, Isa. 30:33) with which the Lord shall dispatch the lawless one. “The appearance of His coming” declares that it will not be annulling him from a distance or by secret action any more than by secondary means, but by the shining forth of His presence. And, as if to cut off all excuse for unbelief, the best text of authority demands our reading, not “the Lord” only, but “the Lord Jesus.” Even the too common attempt to maintain a distinction between “consume” and “destroy” can only be through force of habitual prejudice, not to say ignorance, for the Greek term in the first member of the sentence no more implies a gradual waste than in the second. On every ground then the gospel is out of the question. Together they mean an overwhelming and utter judgment inflicted by the Lord Jesus personally

before all the world, as both related to one and the same destruction.

The apostle now turns to explain the connection of Satan, as also of God's retribution, with the lawless one, "whose coming is according to the working of Satan in all power and signs and wonders of falsehood, and in all deceit of unrighteousness for10 those that perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error that they should believe falsehood, that all might be judged who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (verses 9-12).

The Lord Jesus is the Son of God, and in Him all the fulness was pleased to dwell. The man of sin, the son of perdition, is the awful counterpart of the enemy, and the picture would not be complete if we had not the dark addition of the unseen power of evil at work in him. Here it is given in a few energetic words of the Holy Ghost, falsehood being the universal characteristic: "in all power and signs and wonders of falsehood," the very terms (with the blessed unquestionable contrast of grace and truth) in which the apostle Peter (Acts 2) set out the Messiah, "a man demonstrated of God to you by deeds of power and wonders and signs, which God wrought by him in your midst, even as ye yourselves know." How amazingly solemn that here we have the anti-Messiah described beforehand in language so similar!

The application of all this to the Papacy has quite enervated the force of the scripture among Protestants generally. For they, with such an object before them as the Popes of Rome, naturally think of unreal miracles,

and false pretensions to power and signs which have it as their aim to support their ambitious designs in the world. Macknight as well as another may illustrate this kind of interpretation: — “After the heathen magistrates were taken out of the way by the conversion of Constantine, and after he and his successors called the Christian bishops to meet in general council, and enforced their assumption of divine authority by the civil power, then did they in these councils arrogate to themselves the right of establishing what articles of faith and discipline they thought proper, and of anathematising all who rejected their decrees, a claim which in after times the bishops of Rome transferred from general councils to themselves. It was in this period that worship of saints and angels and images was introduced; celibacy was praised as the highest piety; meats of certain kinds were prohibited; and a variety of superstitious mortifications of the body were enjoined by the decrees of councils in opposition to the express laws of God. In this period likewise idolatry and superstition were recommended to the people by false miracles, and every deceit which wickedness could suggest; such as the miraculous cures pretended to be performed by the bones and other relics of martyrs, in order to induce the ignorant vulgar to worship them as mediators; the feigned visions of angels who, they said, had appeared to this or that hermit, to recommend celibacy, fastings, mortifications of the body, and living in solitude, the apparition of souls from purgatory, who begged that certain superstitions might be practised for delivering them from that confinement. By all which, those assemblies of ecclesiastics, who by their decrees enjoined these corrupt practices, showed themselves to be the man of sin and lawless one in his first form,

whose coming was to be with all power and signs and miracles of falsehood, and who opposed every one that is called God or an object of worship. For these general councils, by introducing the worship of saints and angels as mediators in the place of Christ, they degraded Him from His office of Mediator, or rendered it altogether useless. However, though they thus opposed God and Christ by their unrighteous decrees, they did not yet exalt themselves above every one that is called God or an object of worship. Neither did they yet sit in the temple of God as God, and openly show themselves to be God. Then blasphemous extravagances were to be acted in after times by a number of particular persons in succession; I mean by the bishop of Rome, after the power of the christian Roman emperors, and of the magistrates under them, should be taken out of the way.

“This height, however, of spiritual and civil power united, the bishops of Rome did not attain till, as the apostle foretold, that which restrained was taken out of the way, or till an end was put to the authority of the Roman emperors in the West by the inroads of the barbarous nations; and more especially till the western empire was broken into the ten kingdoms of the fourth beast. For then it was that the bishops of Rome made themselves the sovereigns of Rome, and of its territory, and so became the little horn which Daniel beheld coming up among the ten horns which had ‘the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things,’ to show that its dominion was founded in the deepest policy, and that its strength consisted in the bulls, excommunications, and anathemas it uttered against all who opposed its usurpations But this impious scheme of false doctrine, and the spiritual tyranny founded thereon, agreeably to

the predictions of the prophet Daniel and of the apostle Paul, began at the Reformation to he consumed by the breath of the Lord's mouth; that is, by the preaching of true doctrine out of the scriptures In short, the annals of the world cannot produce persons and events to which the things written in this passage can be applied with so much fitness as to the bishops of Rome. Why then should we be in any doubt concerning the interpretation and application of this famous prophecy? At the conclusion of our explication of prophecy concerning the man of sin, it may be proper to observe, that the events foretold in it, being such as never took place in the world before, and in all probability never will take place in it again, the foreknowledge of them was certainly a matter out of the reach of human conjecture or foresight. It is evident therefore that this prophecy, which from the beginning hath stood on record, taken in conjunction with the accomplishment of it verified by the concurrent testimony of history, affords an illustrative proof of the Divine original of that revelation of which it makes a part, and of the inspiration of the person from whose mouth it proceeded" (Macknight's Apost. Epp. 496, 497, ed. Tegg, 1835).

This copious statement, tersely presenting the scheme of the Protestant school in as good a shape as I know, is given here, and falls before the truth. For the first beast of Rev. 13 (which coalesces with the little horn of Dan. 7) is the Roman empire risen out of the abyss — the beast that was, is not, and shall come or be present. Now this cannot apply to the north-eastern hordes who first broke up the Western Roman empire, and then formed, say, ten kingdoms out of its ruins. Whereas the ten horns of prophecy are to reign for one hour with the

beast, to which they give their power as suzerain; as all perish together at the appearing of the Lord Jesus from heaven (Rev. 17, 19). It is the second beast, which is the religious seducing chief or false prophet, doing great signs, and exercising all the authority of the first beast in his sight, and thus clearly answers to 2 Thess. 2, being distinct from the apostate imperial power, though its staunchest ally.

We have had imperial unity without the ten kingdoms, we have had the ten kingdoms which dismembered the empire without imperial unity, though Charlemagne and Napoleon Bonaparte ardently sought it. There is to be the combination of that imperial power (revived by Satanic power) with the ten kingdoms of the west; and along with this an apostate religious power in Palestine (Dan. 11:36-39), that is certainly identical with the apostle's man of sin, and as clearly the antichrist of the future (not the papacy, wicked as this may have been). It is he whose coming shall be in falsehood what Christ's was in truth with all powers and signs and wonders to support his lie, as the Lord was proved to be of God thereby. And just as Elijah brought down fire from heaven in demonstration that Jehovah, not Baal, was God, so will the lamb-like beast do "in the sight of men" to accredit the beast and himself, the false prophet, setting himself forth as God in the temple of God.

Plainly the Protestant view confounds in the past things differing much (whatever analogy be traceable, for even now, says S. John, there have arisen many antichrists), and Dr. M. goes farther than a. wise man ought in saying that in all probability such events will never take place. The interpretation limps, as error naturally does; for first the general councils that introduced superstition

are treated as “the man of sin”; then, as this is defective as well as vague, the pope of Rome. And when men prophesy who are not prophets, can one wonder that they prophesy falsely? Even the world allows that it is the unexpected that happens. As the believer knows that every word of God must be fulfilled, so these scriptures have not yet been. Mahomet is excluded, impostor though he was, as pretending to no miracle The false prophet of the future in the land will do great signs such as no Pope ever wrought or claimed to work. And he will work “in all deceit of unrighteousness for those that perish;” as Christ by God’s word, in righteousness and holiness of truth, for those that are to be saved. Deceit of unrighteousness characterises every false religion; but here it is “in all deceit of unrighteousness,” and men are lost “because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved.” For here we are given to see the activity of the lawless one, seducing men to their ruin in Satan’s power, as before we had his blasphemous and self-acting antagonism against God Whose glory on earth he had arrogated to the exclusion of every object of worship. And into this men will fall, so much the more because they had the truth familiarly enough before their ears to despise it, never receiving the love of it unto salvation. Lawlessness secretly at work prepares the way for the apostacy; as the utter renunciation of Christianity does for the antichrist, who denies the Father and the Son (as well as that Jesus is the Christ), confirms the resurrection-beast of the dragon’s power at Rome, and sets up as “the king” in the Holy Land.

But there is another feature of moment to be added, judicial hardening from God in His abhorrence of Jewish and Gentile infidelity, apostate as both are from the

gospel and rebellious against Himself. “And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe falsehood.” So there was with Pharaoh in Egypt after slighting ample appeals and solemn signs; so again it was among the Jews, partially before the Babylonish captivity, fully in the rejection of the Messiah and (we may add) of the Holy Ghost and the gospel, so there will be when Christendom becomes apostate and amalgamates with the infidel Jews in worshipping as the true God him who comes in his own name, “that all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

Remark here that, though undoubtedly the Received Text is wrong, and the best authorities exclude the future, it is simply absurd to say that the verb is present (“sendeth”), because the mystery of lawlessness is already working. It is ethical, not historic, as often and indeed like “is” in verse 9. Even Dean Alford and Bishop Ellicott could not hold that the lawless one is revealed, as the context proves his revelation to be contrasted as a future thing with the actual and secret working of lawlessness. Compare Rev. 14:9-11. “Damned” in the Authorised Version is false as a rendering, but the result of being “judged” is damnation, for only unbelievers come into judgment; and therefore, pleads the Psalmist, “Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.” Salvation is by grace through faith, God having already nor only pardoned the believer, but condemned sin in the flesh by Christ as a sacrifice for sin, that there might be no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus. Rom. 8:1-4.

With a retribution so terrible yet so righteous on apostate enemies, the apostle puts in contrast the assured portion of the believers to whom he writes.

“But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you brethren beloved of [the] Lord, that God chose you from [the] beginning11 unto salvation in sanctification of [the] Spirit and belief of [the] truth; whereunto12 he called you by our gospel unto obtaining of [the] glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (verses 13, 14).

The manifested character and awful doom of those who abandoned the truth when most fully brought out had been laid before us. Now we are told of the simple blessedness of those who cleave to the grace of our Lord in the gospel, and its effect upon the heart of those who wrought in the work, and were sharers in the blessing. It would be a poor ground of thanksgiving if the salvation were precarious; but this is quite to mistake the nature of Christianity, which is founded on the glory of Christ’s person and on the everlasting efficacy of His atoning work. Hence on the one hand the unspeakable guilt of rejecting, and above all of apostatizing from it; as on the other hand the blessedness and security of those who enter in by faith. Peace, joy, thanksgiving are the fruits of the love of God thus shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us. And no wonder; it is God’s own joy and love flowing in and out of hearts, all round, purified by faith. Doubts and fears are not of faith any more than the presumption founded upon our own estimate of ourselves, the natural effect of law acting upon the human mind for despair or false confidence.

Christ and His work of redemption alone give a true foundation before God, and as the foundation is

immutable, so with faith there need be hesitation neither in the channels nor in the objects of this grace, as we see here. “But we ought to give thanks to God for you always, brethren beloved of the Lord.” This is not the unbelieving language of man. Divine love reproduced in the believer’s heart delights in owning the present fruits of grace. There is no reserve where no such mischief was at work as called it forth. Had there been the admission of human righteousness or going back to ordinances, as we see in the Epistles to the Galatians, Colossians, and Hebrews, the apostle would have solemnly warned and even spoken conditionally; for there the Spirit of God descried real, actual, and growing danger, Here, where there was simplicity, there was no call for such guarded language. As the workmen were bound to give thanks always to God for them, so the saints are designated as brethren beloved of the Lord. What honour, what happiness, unsullied by suspicion or question on either side!

For what then do the apostle and those with him so continually thank God? That God chose the Thessalonians from the beginning unto salvation. The context appears to decide that “from the beginning” must be interpreted in the largest sense, not merely from the beginning of the gospel or of Christ’s manifestation on earth, but from of old from everlasting. “Chose,” too, is somewhat peculiar here, not so much chose out from others as chose for Himself, a Septuagintal usage. This is sweet and comforting to a believer whom true repentance has made nothing in his own eyes, if nature take it up, it turns to pride and hardness without a drop of real consolation.

But the way in which God's choice operates in time is next shown with brevity and clearness, "in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Here I conceive there cannot be a doubt that sanctification of the Spirit means, that mighty separative act of the Holy Ghost, by which a soul is first livingly set apart to God; and so it is accompanied by faith of the truth. Practical holiness is the consequence, and this we have seen insisted on in 1 Thess. 4:3, 7, 1 Thess. 5:23. Here it is rather the great principle and power which accompanies conversion to God, so generally overlooked in Christendom, or, if the thing be seen and owned more or less, not called by its true name. It is that operation which meets a man when a sinner, and by grace constitutes him a saint. People are willing to allow it afterwards in practice, but are afraid to own its truth at the starting point. They are too far from God, too unbelieving in the energy of His grace and the wisdom of His means, to accredit His work in the soul, which, however deep, has as yet little to show for itself before men. But there is belief of the truth; and confession of the Lord, of course, accompanies this. There may, however, be at that stage many a difficulty and much searching of heart, which the Lord turns to real and permanent account, though not a little, especially in our day, as in special circumstances of old, may be due to legal bondage. Still grace gives confidence, that the light of God may thoroughly search the heart, and if Christ be kept in view, the more it is searched the better. If Christ be shrouded by the law-work in the soul, there cannot as yet be peace but distress, as in the latter part of Romans 7. The person, however, is no less a saint then, than when set free by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, as in Romans 8:2, though the latter alone describes the proper

condition of a christian. Practical holiness follows in the exhortation of Romans 12, etc.

1 Peter 1:2 helps greatly to fix the sense, not only here but in 1 Cor. 6, where sanctification follows washing, and precedes justification. This every theologian must know is quite outside the ordinary systems of divinity. There is no question here of sanctification in the practical life after justification, which all admit and insist on; but the theological systems omit the very important bearing in scripture. and therefore to real faith, of sanctification before justification. Of that fundamental preliminary work it really cannot be pretended they know anything; nor is it pressed in the pulpits of great men or of small, being ignored popularly no less than theologically. The truth in fact has dropped through, and from every school, ancient or modern, Calvinist or Arminian. Hence the difficulty both for Roman Catholics and for Protestants. The Vulgate gives “in sanctificationem Spiritus, ad” etc., which the Rhemish version (1582) reproduces “into sanctification of the Spirit, unto the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ,” as the Geneva version (1557) had yet farther strayed in saying “vnto sanctification of the sprite, through obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”

It was the influence of Theodore de Bèze, which acted so banefully on the English exiles; for he in his just preceding version (1556) had ventured to translate “ad sanctificationem Spiritus, per obedientiam et aspersionem sanguinis I. C.” and even to argue for this perversion in the notes of his subsequent editions. In his first Greek and Latin New Testament (Tiguri, 1559, as in all four later) he boldly says, “Ad sanctificationem

Spiritus, ἐν ἁγιασμῳ πνεύματος. Id est εἰς ἁγ..... Erasmus, Per sanctificationem Spiritus; non satis apposite. Per obedientiam, εἰς ὑπακοήν. Id est δι᾽ ὑπακοῆς, etc." Now it was not ignorance of either Latin or Greek which led the French Reformer into these stupendous misrenderings; it was a defective though presumptuous theological system which still exercises a similar tyranny over men's minds. For, learned or unlearned, they go to scripture, not to learn in simplicity what God has there revealed to His children, but to get proof if they can of tenets they have imbibed from the nursery, and never think of bringing to the absolute test of the scriptural standard. Thus it is plain that the prevalent error as to sanctification led Beza, who assumed it to be the truth, to change the force of the inspired words doubly. Erasmus may not have hit the mark in "per sanctificationem Spiritus," but he is incomparably nearer than his critic. For ἐν must often be and is rightly rendered "by" or "with," not "through" like διά of agency or means, but expressing a characteristic cause or abiding state, where "in" would scarcely suffice or suit.

It is therefore a question here between "by" or "in"; but "to" or "unto" is positively and inexcusably false, and can never be in such a context the meaning of ἐν. In contrast with Israel set apart by an outward rite for obeying God's law under the solemn sanction of the victim's blood, which sprinkled both the book and the people, and so held death before them as the penalty of transgression, the believing Jews are addressed as elect according to the knowledge of God the Father, by (or in) sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, i.e. for obeying as sons of God (so

Jesus did in the highest way), and as freed from their guilt by His blood. Hence εἰς ὑπακοὴν καὶ ῥ. is perfectly regular and beautifully true, as indicating the blessed object in constant view to which the Christian is set apart by the Holy Spirit: to obey not as an Israelite under legal bondage and with death as the penalty of failure, but in the liberty of Christ Whose blood cleanses him from all sin. By the obedience and blood of Jesus may suit Protestant confessions of faith, but it is a painful inversion of the apostle's language; as to say εἰς ὑπ. = δι᾽ ὑπ. is unworthy of a scholar far beneath the erudite and able successor of Calvin. But all this shows that the sanctification of the Spirit here in question describes that vital work in separating a soul to God when born again, which is followed by justification when the soul submits to the righteousness of God in Christ; as practical holiness is the issue in the consequent walk.

But God's secret power in the Spirit's separation to Himself is not all. That there should be sanctification and belief of the truth He uses means and calls by the gospel; or, as it is here said, whereunto He called you through our gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus, if we have God's purpose in Himself before time, we have the object He proposed as to the saints for eternity. He chose them from the beginning unto salvation. This He effectuated in time for the saints in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, not by a law curbing the lusts and passions of a fleshly people under the elements of the world.

For God will not now own aught less than inward reality in subjection to His own revealed mind. And what He

employs to produce this holy result is the gospel, so preached by Paul and those with him. For, while the gospel is of God and concerning His Son, none the less was our apostle the most honoured instrument of His grace in bringing out its full character as well as its deep foundations. All the apostles preached it, and Peter with especial success in acting on thousands from the first. But Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, not only preached with unprecedented fulness the glad tidings of the unsearchable riches of Christ, but entrusted directly and indirectly the truth as he knew it to faithful men, such as were competent to instruct others also.

And then the end, how high and holy as well as excellent! How worthy of God and suitable for His children! It was not merely to attain blessing, but “to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” As He is the One in whom all the divine counsels centre for the display of His own excellency, so would His grace have us who now believe to share it with Him. “If children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.”

It is remarkable how the thoughts of men cross the word of God when His grace is brought out as a living, believed, and applied reality. Speculative men wonder and judge after their puny way that the apostle should call the saints to steadfast adherence in ways and words to the truth, after he had just owned their calling of God to obtain the glory of our Lord. The mere mind of man regards this as logical inconsistency, conscious or not: why, reason they, should those elected to salvation be exhorted to aught more? Is not all sure and settled on

divine grounds? But it is the elect, the consciously blessed and happy children of God, whom scripture everywhere urges to vigilance and prayer, to reading the word of God and all other means of spiritual well-being; never do we find such calls to the unbelieving and the fearful. Those who owe all, and who own that all is due, to sovereign grace, are the very persons to show diligence in their responsible services day by day. And how can this be known save by the revelation of His mind? If we are God's workmanship, we were created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God before prepared that we should walk in them. To faith alone all is plain and sure. If Christ is believed on God's testimony, we believe His love from first to last, and His word is a law of liberty to our souls. The reasoning that sets His. grace at issue with our responsibility is seen at once to be of Satan. Subject to the word we believe both, go forward in peace, but acknowledge the need of all lie lays on us.

"So then, brethren, stand firm and hold fast the traditions which ye were taught whether by word or by letter of ours. But our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, that loved us and gave everlasting encouragement and good hope through grace, encourage your hearts and stablish13 in every good work and word" (verses 15-17).

There can not be asked a more conclusive disproof of that ecclesiastical consciousness (ἐκκλησιαστὶκον φρόνημα) which Dr. J. A. Moehler (Symbolik, § xxxviii.) claims for the Romish body, as the true sense of tradition, than this verse 15 affords. For the peculiar sense existing in their midst and transmitted by ecclesiastical education, is a coloured light which misleads souls, not only involving but sealing them up in

error, with so much the more self-security because they assume it to be the general faith of the church throughout all ages as against particular opinion, the judgment of the church as against that of the individual.

But this is a merely natural sentiment, such as pervades every department of human life; not only every nation having its own peculiar character imprinted on the most hidden parts of its being, as well as manifested in every relation, but each considerable society, religious or political, literary or scientific, having its own traditional and distinctive spirit, with which it strives to carry out its aims consistently.

To argue from such an analogy is to deny the reality of the church as a divine institution, and to sever the living link of each believer with God. The Holy Ghost sent down from heaven is the sole power of preserving intact both the individual relationship of the Christian, and the common walk of the church. For if the church is God's temple (1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 2 Cor. 6; 16), so is the body of every saint now (1 Cor. 6:19); the presence of the Spirit makes good the privilege alike in either case. Undoubtedly His presence is productive of the most important and blessed results; but the church is no judge in matters of faith, still less is it infallible in interpreting the divine word or in aught else. The church is the lady, not the Lord, and is bound by her essential relationship to obedience as her prime and inalienable duty. Hence the Lord sent the apostles as His vicegerents, who, as need arose, made known His word and will to the church. They were the Lord's commandments, even when orally communicated; and they were in due time written by the apostles, though not all at once, but in fact as required. Let unbelievers,

if they will, accuse scripture of deficiency or other faults. We believers know that it is adequate to make the man of God complete, furnished completely to every good work. What sort of logic is it that would attribute so perfect a result to imperfect means?

Never was it from the assembly that the word of God went forth, but from the Lord through servants extraordinarily chosen and endowed by divine power to that end. And the word came not to any particular assembly alone, but as of God binding on all that called on the Lord, whatever the special circumstances which drew it forth. Hence says the great apostle, “If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge [or take knowledge of] the things that I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord” (1 Cor. 14:37). If the apostles were authoritative envoys, it was the Lord’s authority they imposed on the church, which was bound to unqualified subjection. His name is the all-important claim; theirs only as vouchers for it; the church being responsible simply to obey.

So when Paul wrote his first epistle to the Thessalonians, he adjured them by the Lord that it be read to all the (brethren, or holy) brethren. They were young in the Lord, having been not long converted and only enjoying his instruction for a sufficiently brief season. Yet does divine wisdom see no ground for withholding from these babes in the truth a communication remarkable for its freedom in presenting some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and ill-established wrest, as also the other scriptures, to their own destruction. On the contrary, and, perhaps because it was the first epistle written to the Gentiles, the inspired writer employs language of striking

solemnity to impress on all the duty of hearing what he charges to be read to all.

And now again, in the second epistle, he says, “Accordingly then, brethren, stand firm, and hold fast the traditions which ye were taught whether by word or by letter of ours” (verse 15). Beyond a doubt the delivered instructions embrace oral and epistolary teaching, and in no way allow an indefinite sense actuating powerfully but almost insensibly a community from age to age. The traditions which the apostle urges the church to hold fast were known and possessed truth (1 Cor. 11:2), not at all scripture supplemented by a vague spiritual sense that would mould all by its intrinsic influence. The Romish idea is unknown to and excluded by scripture, which insists on the Lord originating and forming all that is His will by that word which the Spirit makes effectual in all His operations from quickening to the highest edification, and alike in worship and in service. For He is here in the individual saint, and in the assembly, to glorify Christ according to the Father’s will. The theory of a dual rule of faith betrays its real character as a rival of scripture, and a rebel against God Whose glory admits of no co-ordinate authority, such as its tradition cannot but assume to be. For this supposes defect in scripture, and claims, though human, nothing less than divine honour. A tradition you have not got and do not know is not only an absurd contradiction of the only true sense of tradition in scripture, but its assertion by Romanism exposes its votaries to the purely human tradition of the elders, which the Lord denounced as commandments of men which make void the word of God. In vain do such worship God; they honour Him with their lips, but their

heart is far from Him. The word of God alone has an absolute title over the heart and conscience of His people.

It may be added that this in no way supersedes ministry. For the right exercise of every gift from Christ (and all real ministers are His gifts or δόματα to the church) is to bring the gracious authority of God as revealed in His word to bear in power on the soul. It is the enemy who would interpose between God and His children to whom His word addresses itself. For it is not so much a question of our right to His word, but far more of God's right to instruct and guide, correct and warn His own. And hence the great bulk of New Testament scripture is to the saints as such, not to chiefs like Timothy or Titus, though these two are not forgotten, as if they needed no special exhortation. True ministry will never enfeeble or deny God's rights by interposing itself or aught else between the conscience and God. Its appointed work is, as it always was, to help souls in their desire and duty to know the will of God.

But when the causes of ruin so far wrought among the saints as to bring before the Holy Spirit the blinding power of corrupted Christendom, He more than ever insists on the value of scripture (not a word in the later epistles about the oral part of what was delivered), as the intended safeguard in presence of men speaking perverse things, or of grievous wolves in sheep's clothing. Hence we are bound to test both ministerial dicta and church action, by the word ever living and abiding. The denial of such a responsibility is Romanism in principle, wherever it may be, and this so real and thinly disguised as to deceive none but the victims of delusion. Just in proportion to the power of the Spirit

which accompanies the preaching or teaching of Christ's servant, does the word neutralise extraneous influence of every kind, as well as judge and destroy hindrances from within. So the soul realises its immediate obligation to hear and obey God; accepting, not man's word, but as it truly is, God's word which also works in him that believes.

On the one hand when the professing body holds a form of godliness but denies its power, we are told to turn away, were it even in most favoured Ephesus, on the other hand, we are told in the same context to abide in the things we have learned and been assured of, knowing of whom they were learnt — from the apostle — in the fullest contrast with the vague latent tradition which worldly wisdom wants, as a sort of common law in Christendom. Not tradition, but the sacred writings as a whole are able to make wise unto salvation, not without but through faith which is in Christ Jesus. When the highest claim on earth, when the church, would be a snare, he that would here below stand firm for God's glory and will, is referred to every scripture as divinely inspired and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction that is in righteousness. Woe be to whatever comes between the soul and God, darkening, destroying, and denying that which alone has direct and paramount authority, as it must judge at the last day. It is that which we have "heard from the beginning": what comes in since has no divine authority, were it ever so ancient and venerable. God would guide His own, and uses ministry the rather to effect it, by His children's faith in His word.

The expression of thankfulness for the assured blessing of the Thessalonians, in contrast with the everlasting

ruin of the apostates from Christ and Christianity, is followed up not only by an exhortation to stand firm in the truth of God given to them, but by a prayer suited to their need. “But our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, that loved us and gave everlasting encouragement and good hope through grace, encourage your hearts and stablish [them] in every good work and word” (verses 16, 17). He who came out from God to sinful man on earth, and went to God in heaven after the accomplishment of redemption, revealed Him as our Father, as Himself abides our Lord. God is fully manifested to faith, and the believer fully blest whilst waiting for Christ’s return to complete for the body what is already done for the soul.

The apostle desires that grace may cover all the path that intervenes with that divine encouragement, which alike suits His past goodness, and His people’s exposure to suffering and sorrow, and the more so, because they are called to bear a steadfast testimony to Christ, inwardly and outwardly, in every good work and word. A wonderful call, when we think of God and His Son on the one hand, and of ourselves on the other! Who is sufficient for these things? Our sufficiency is of God, Who has given us His Spirit, that divine power might not be lacking to the least of His children for their arduous but blessed mission. Here again the gift of ever lasting encouragement does not stifle, but rather draw out and strengthen, the prayer that He may encourage His children’s hearts. Our Lord, and God our Father, are remarkably identified in thus cheering and strengthening us now, as in 1 Thess. 3:11: a special phraseology, inexplicable save grounded on the eternal

relation of the Father and the Son, and their unity of nature in the Godhead

2 Thessalonians 3.

From prayerful desires for his beloved Thessalonians the apostle turns to ask their intercession on behalf of the testimony of the Lord generally, and especially of himself and his companions in their continual exposure to the adversary.

“For the rest, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified, even as also with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and evil men, for all have not faith. But faithful is the Lord who shall stablish you and keep from evil. And we have trust in [the] Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we charge. And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the14 patience of the Christ” (verses 1-5).

It is beautiful to see how grace binds all believing hearts together through Christ. The apostle was the most gifted and energetic servant whom the Lord ever raised up to spread the knowledge of Himself throughout the world. In him the call of sovereign grace, not only as a saint but as an apostle, found its highest expression: “not of men, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.” He neither received the gospel of man nor was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. And when it pleased Him Who separated him from his mother’s womb, and called him by His grace, to reveal His Son in him that he might preach Him among the nations, “immediately I conferred not,” says he, “with flesh and blood.” Yet the same man, who was thus formed and led of God

manifestly to break the very semblance of a successional chain in official position as well as in the revelation of the truth, earnestly enlists the prayerful interest of the youngest brethren, his own newly-born children in the faith, in world-wide labours, both evangelic and ecclesiastic, encompassed with grave and frequent perils. On the one hand no one, no thing, must intervene between the risen Christ and His servant sent on the mission of His grace, on the other he (most markedly independent of men in his mission, in order that no mist may obscure the call of Christ or the message of His love) is the most dependent of all men on divine guidance and support, and thus the most desirous of the sustaining prayers of the saints.

What gracious wisdom shore was in God's thus ordering must be apparent to any spiritual mind. Was it Paul and his companions who alone reaped the blessing of the saints, however young in the faith, thus praying? Could anything be more strengthening or elevating or purifying to the believers themselves, unless it were direct occupation with Christ Himself, which indeed was promoted in no small degree by this very identification of heart with that which is ever so near His heart? Whatever draws out the affections toward the Lord in that which glorifies Him and His word is so much the purer gain for His treasury and ours, as it is deliverance from self and present things where Satan easily ensnares. And as His word ran and was glorified with the Thessalonians, they could the more really and simply pray that so it should be elsewhere. They were not cast down or distracted by internal and humiliating, complications, which preoccupy the spirit and hinder the outgoing of heart far and wide for the blessing of others

to His praise. Paul could freely ask, and they without stint or effort give, their prayers. The word of the Lord might make rapid progress, without a deep result in man, and without glory to Him Who is its source; the apostle would have them pray that it should be glorified even as also among themselves it was, They could therefore the more truly and heartily desire this from God elsewhere.

Besides this, many adversaries fail not, as surely as grace gives an open and effectual door for the testimony of Christ. Never does the apostle, never did a spiritual man, boast of the numbers or the position, of the wealth or the intelligence, of his supporters. no surer sign of the world, nor of Satan's snare among those who take the ground of faith. The apostle does ask their prayers "that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men, for all have not faith." The word here translated "unreasonable," ἄτοποι, meant originally "out of place," and hence strange, marvellous, and in a moral sense worthless, as saying and doing what was unsuitable and out of the way. I know not why "the faith" should be preferred to "faith" in the abstract: the Greek will bear either. Nor do these adversaries mean Jews only, though these were prominent and active in bitter unbelief. Faith is natural to no sinner's heart; it is ever of grace.

There is, however, a blessed resource, as they are told by one who well knew how far party hatred and personal detraction can go: — "But the Lord is faithful who shall stablish you and keep from wickedness" (or "evil" verse 3). His faithfulness answers to the faith of His own, be it ever so feeble; His face is against those that do evil, as His eyes are upon the righteous, and His ears unto their

cry. Hence the confidence that He would strengthen the Thessalonian saints and guard them from evil. So faith reasons and is ever entitled to reason. Nor can any ground be stronger; for it is from God to man, not from man to God, as men are prone to reason to their disappointment, shame, and sorrow. For as our Lord Himself warned His own, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” They sleep when they should pray, and may flee or even deny where they ought to stand and confess. How different the other side! “But God commendeth His own love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Rom. 5:8-10). So here the argument of the Lord’s grace is before the apostle, who would have the disciples empowered in Him and in the strength of His might, the secret of victory to faith.

But if the end be thus sure, grace makes the way plain, the yoke easy, and the burden light. The obedience of Christ is the law of liberty. To a single eye His path is alone the question. Therefore the apostle has not a doubt that the saints addressed are as desirous of doing the Lord’s will, as he of making it duly known. “And we have trust in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we charge” (verse 4). For there is a distinction between Christ’s giving us rest, and our finding rest to our souls. The former is of sovereign grace, however labouring or burdened we might be, and the gift is free and full to sinners according to the glory of His person and the goodness of the errand on which

He came and suffered; the other is of divine government, and we as children of God find rest to our souls day by day, not certainly in self-will which is our danger, but in simple-hearted subjection to Him and confidence in Him, even as He Himself always did the things which pleased the Father Who sent Him, and could say that it was His food to finish His work — that He kept His Father's commandments and abode in His love. It is in obeying Him only that the believer finds rest to his soul; and so the apostle counts on the Thessalonians here.

Verse 5 comes in beautifully to complete the paragraph: "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of the Christ." Could anything more effectually strengthen or keep souls in obedience? We need not follow those who in times ancient or modern contend that the Holy Ghost is here objectively before us: there is no sufficient ground for abandoning the usage of scripture. By "the Lord" is meant as elsewhere Jesus the Son of God! to Whom he wishes to keep them straight; and this, by drawing and fixing their affections in the love of God and in the patience of the Christ. But even here, and in both respects, we have to face the doubts of learned men and their difficulties in submitting to the truth. We are told with sufficient confidence, that the first, from the fact of his wishing that their hearts may be directed into it, must be subjective, the love of man to God. The objective meaning, God's love, is said to be out of the question. This may seem "natural"; but it just destroys the force of the truth. The simple meaning is also the deepest and alone true. The apostle would have our hearts guided into the love of God, the love in which He has His being,

forming His counsels, and acting as well as revealing Himself. This too alone secures our love to Him, which is at best tiny indeed, compared with that unfailing source and infinite fulness which Christ personally and in His work has discovered to us, and the Holy Spirit has shed abroad in our hearts. It is, one grants, very natural to think of our love to Him; but the sight of Christ by faith gives the word living power and leads us into God's love as revealed in Christ, Who alone (and not we) could be an adequate object to draw out and unfold the affections of God and His moral glory. And thus it is that we learn ourselves even to be the object of His love in a way and degree which otherwise had been impossible, for He gives His own to know that "as He is, so are they in this world," and that the love wherewith the Father loved the Son is in them, and Himself in them (1 John 4:17, John 17:26).

Such love as this alone delivers from self practically; whilst it produces its like in us without effort or thought about it. Nor is there any other means comparable, for it is His way; especially if our hearts are also directed "into the patience of the Christ," not, I think, the endurance which He showed when here, however true and blessed it may be for us to cultivate that, but His patient waiting for the blissful meeting of His own, thenceforward changed into His glorious image at His coming. For this He waits patiently in heaven, as we now wait for Him on earth. Into the communion of His patience, as well as of God's love, would He lead our hearts.

Toward the beginning of the first epistle the Thessalonians were said to be converted to serve a living and true God, and to await His Son from the

heavens. Here toward the end of the second we have in substance the same elements, with the shade of difference proper to each case. The apostle sought the well-being, enjoyment, and progress of the saints; and what can effect these so well as directing their hearts into the love of God and the patience of Christ? The God whose love we know is His Father and our Father, His God and our God; the words the Father gave to Him He has given to us; and He is coming to introduce us into the glory which will make the world know that the Father sent Him and loved us as He was loved. We ought not to wait for any such demonstration of it, but to rest in His perfect love, as we wait patiently for Christ. Rev. 3:10 is a clear instance that ὑπομονή has this meaning; and so in 1 Thess. 1:3. Other occurrences in the sense of "endurance" cannot disprove it. We must leave room for the modifications of language by the context in all speech, most of all in a book so surpassingly rich and deep as the Bible One-sidedness, always a hindrance and a danger, is nowhere so injurious as in the exposition of scripture: yet where is it so habitual? May we be warned and watchful.

It remains to direct the saints how to deal, not with wickedness as at Corinth, but with the disorderly ways of any in fellowship. No sin is to be ignored or passed by in God's habitation; and His dwelling there is the measure of judgment for His children. What is offensive to Him, what grieves His Spirit, what dishonours the Lord Who made Him known and embodied His will livingly, cannot be indifferent to those who are called to bear witness to His nature, grace, and glory. But one of the ways in which He exercises the hearts of His children is in representing Him aright when they have to

face and judge the delinquencies of one another. On the one hand they are responsible never to wink at evil, now that they have all beheld God's unsparing judgment of it, as well as its demonstrated hatefulness, in the cross. On the other they are not set to legislate, as if they enjoyed continual inspiration by apostolic succession, or that God had not already revealed His mind completely in the scriptures by chosen instruments "from the beginning." The church is here to obey; the Lord directs with a wisdom and righteousness worthy of Himself, as we learn best in the spirit of dependence, and by real exercises of obedience. The Spirit of God works in the assembly, as well as in each individual, to apply the written word with a divinely given intelligence. For there are dangers owing to nature on either side: the easy-going gentleness which shrinks from duly probing and justly estimating evil; the Draconic severity which visits lesser faults with such rigour that there is no sterner dealing left for what is far worse. Scripture meets all by giving us both precept and example, that principle from God and not man may cover all, and direct conscience in each, with an unforced conviction of His will.

"Now we charge you, brethren, in [the] name of our15 Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw from every brother walking disorderly and not according to the tradition which they16 received from us."

As yet there had been in the Thessalonian assembly no such case of scandalous wickedness as 1 Cor. 5 afterwards dealt with. Yet in the first epistle the apostle saw reason under the inspiration of God to warn the saints against personal impurity as well as to caution each not to wrong his brother in the matter. It is an

offence which especially affronts the Holy Spirit given to us; and the Lord is the avenger in all these things. And in urging what is wholly different, brotherly love, even as the saints are taught of God to love one another, he had exhorted them earnestly to seek to be quiet, and to mind their own affairs, and work with their own hands.

But, as the bright hope (we have seen) had somewhat waned for their hearts, when he wrote his second epistle, he had to feel also that some had heeded too lightly his call to walk honourably toward those without, so as to have need of nothing or of no one. It was not, in my judgment, too enthusiastic absorption with the Lord's coming which induced any to neglect their daily duty; it may have rather been that excited apprehension of the day of the Lord, as if already set in, which indisposed some to honest labour and gave rise to the gossiping communication of their fears which would naturally flow from such an error, as it has often done singe. Be the motive as it may, the sorrowful fact was then patent, that some in their midst were now walking in the disorderly way already denounced; and the apostle accordingly adopts still more solemn language in directing the saints how to meet the dishonour thus done to the Lord. With that name he binds up his injunction that they should withdraw, or keep themselves, from "every brother" walking so unworthily. The disorderly are not described as wicked persons, but still spoken of as brethren; yet it was a course which even moral men would feel to be disreputable, and this aggravated by their indifference to, if not defiance of, the previous exhortation of the apostle here referred to.

Thus they were inexcusable if the Christian is saved to glorify the Lord. And what were their brethren to do, if

that name swayed their hearts supremely? Never was a greater fallacy than to imagine the assembly left to spiritual instinct under the plea of the Lord's authority. Not so: "if any man thinketh himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge (or take knowledge of) the things that I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord." "From the beginning" it was so; and it is assuredly quite as necessary now. The church is called to obey even in the exercise of its most serious functions. There is the most frequent temptation to assume discretionary power; and Christendom has everywhere fallen into the snare. But such an assumption is really a departure from the one invariable duty of obedience, the sole path of honour to the Lord, and of blessing to the saints themselves. It ought not to be irksome for any who love His name, it is certainly safe for those who are not merely incompetent for a task beyond man, but are here simply as witnesses of Him. And it is recorded for our admonition that in the only council of which scripture speaks, on an occasion of the utmost moment for the truth and liberty of the gospel, with all the apostles present, not to speak of other chief men among the brethren, there was much discussion before all in Jerusalem, as there had been previously through Judaisers among the Gentiles, till the decisive judgment agreeably to "the words of the prophets" was given by James, and decrees framed accordingly were sent to be kept among the assemblies. Even they, the apostles and the elders with the whole church, needed, and had, the scripture as the end of controversy.

So here, though the occasion was most ordinary, the apostle enjoins the brethren in the name of our Lord

Jesus Christ. All are bound to walk according to apostolic teaching.

But smaller offences are no more left out of the scriptures than the great. Nor will a love for Christ allow any stain, be it ever so slight, among those who bear His name. The assembly must never be the shelter of evil: what does not suit Him does not suit those who represent Him on earth. But to put away is not His will for all that is offensive to Him. Even of old He could say He hated putting away in the earthly and natural. In the spiritual domain it is only right when, according to His word, it is imperatively due to His glory. Levity in what is so grave one can understand in a petty sect governed by self-will; it is unworthy of those who know what the church is to Him Who gave Himself for it. But in things great or small it is the Lord Who regulates all by His word, which His servants are responsible to apply truly in the Spirit. Hence have we the apostle here enjoining His will on the disorderly walk of some in Thessalonica. To pass it by would be not merely their loss but His shame. To leave it vague would open the door for the self-importance of man ready enough to define and exact. The apostle was given to treat the offence gravely but with measure This was righteous, and man (as of course he is ever bound) ought to be in the place of obedience But, even in calling the saints to mark their reproof of disorder, the apostle deigns to plead with the hearts and consciences of all. “For yourselves know (says he) how ye ought to imitate us; because we were not disorderly among you, nor did we eat bread for nought from any one, but in toil and travail, working night and day,17 that we might not burden any of you: not because we have not title, but to make ourselves an

example to you that ye should imitate us" (verses 7-9). How blessedly he can exhort them to follow, conscious of his own following the Master! an incomparably truer "imitation of Christ" than the monastic one so popular in Christendom. Yet he who could say with a good conscience "we were not disorderly among you" was not behind the very chiefest apostles.

Nor did he claim aught from the saints he had left behind, nor from the Thessalonian converts who were learning from him the ways of Christ; but he set a pattern of unselfish grace at great cost to himself. How had some of those begotten by the gospel he preached learnt the lesson? how had Christendom, which would deny the least title in the ministry of Christ to one in this important way following the wake of the great apostle of the Gentiles? Does memory fail, or does not the prohibition of any such toil or travail in a minister of the word figure prominently in the ecclesiastical canon-book? But those who invent tests and rules are not afraid to contradict scripture and in effect to censure the apostle. Their imitation of Christ is more sentimental and pretentious; his was as deep and real as it was very homely and of no account, save indeed to be shunned and despised by the least and lowest of sects, as well as by those who more openly seek the world which their hearts value. The apostle (filled with the love which is of God, and not of the world as Christ is not) sought not theirs but them, and could point to his own daily ways, when among them at the beginning of the gospel, in witness of a self-denial, which of itself rebuked in the strongest yet most gracious way the disorderly brethren, who were working neither day nor night, and were not

ashamed to eat the bread of every one who would supply them for nought.

It is to be noticed that this too is not the first time the apostle recalls his labours for his own support while evangelising among them in Thessalonica and teaching the young converts; for he speaks of it in similar terms in the second chapter of his earlier epistle. It was heavenly devotedness, and the mention of it no less single-hearted. He would not be burdensome to any of them. To me, he could say at a later day, to live is Christ. Without doubt this showed itself primarily in dependence on and delight in Christ, in the Spirit's lifting the heart into habitual rest and joy in the Lord above all that attracts and seduces, and consequent victory over the wiles and power of Satan. But the outer life corresponds with the inner, and the power and grace of Christ not only are in the spiritual affections but issue also in love to God by the outward ways which have the divine impress and savour of Christ. If he exhorted his son Timothy in his last epistle to be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, he knew long before what it was to be so strengthened himself; and this cannot but disclose itself in giving a fresh colour to the ordinary things of this life, so that they become in truth the most extraordinary.

Yet the apostle is careful to assert the labourers' title, though he speaks as he worked in a total self-surrender: "not because we have not title, but to make ourselves an example to you that ye should imitate us" (verse 9). It is one thing to assert the right that the Lord confers on His service, quite another where it might be misinterpreted or misapplied. Here, as at Corinth, he foregoes that which he carefully explains to be a divinely given title of

much moment to maintain both for the givers and the receivers, to say nothing of His wisdom Who so laid down His will. An overflowing charity which thought only of the blessing of others and above all of Christ's glory filled his spirit and accounts for all, whether it may be maintaining a principle perfectly right in itself and of importance to others, or abandoning at this time his own just claims in honour of Christ and the gospel.

Nor did it cost him nothing. A man of means may preach and teach publicly and privately; but then he escapes necessarily the pressure of manual labour by day or by night. When wearied by his spiritual exertions, he has not to think of filling up with other work every available minute that he can fittingly abstract for the supply of his bodily wants. The apostle, in an energy of devoted love which has never been equalled among the sons of men, tells us in a few words the simple truth of his ordinary life, while enjoining the saints how to mark their sense of the disorder in Thessalonica. And he faithfully lets them know that he was giving them this truly christian zeal as an example for their imitation. How it acted on the Thessalonians in general we know not; but we may be sure that such a gracious abandonment of fleshly ease and of worldly etiquette was eminently suited to inflict the most withering rebuke on the idlers who, liking to talk rather than work, imposed on the kindness of the brethren and dishonoured the Lord. How blessed when the fault of others turns to our learning afresh the grace of Christ as it applies in a world of sin, selfishness, and misery! Still more so, when he who thus teaches walked from first to last in the grace he commends to others; and this, not only as now to the saints generally but to the elders in particular, as we read in his parting

address at a later day to the Ephesian overseers at Miletus. “Ye yourselves know that these hands ministered to my wants and to those that were with me. I showed you all things that so labouring ye ought to help the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

What an immeasurable gap between this true-hearted disinterestedness, and the base begging of the mendicant friars, Franciscan or Dominican! For they appealed in a natural way to the feelings of mankind by a show of austerity beyond scripture, and thereby amassed vast wealth in the end, and what men value yet more, incalculable influence and power from the highest to the lowest, save among those who saw through their pretensions to spirituality, or were jealous of a reputation which eclipsed their own. To say with Rabban Gamaliel that one thus working was like a vineyard that is fenced is far beneath the apostle; lowly love was active there. It was to live Christ every day, without the bondage of a vow in a liberty that could accept the offering of his dear and poor children at Philippi. For there is no doubt on the one hand of the right to support, and of the duty on the other hand of the saints to render it ungrudgingly. But grace knows how and when on the labourers’ part to dispense with it, if the glory of Christ or a special lesson to souls so calls for it as here. And how real and faithful is the guidance of the Spirit! For who can suppose that, when the apostle thus wrought with his own hands by midnight lamp in the tent-making of his early days and native land, he foresaw the need of reminding the Thessalonian saints of his habitual and incessant labours in this kind during

his brief visit to their city? But what believer can doubt that the Spirit of God led the blessed man, both in thus labouring when there, and in now laying it upon the saints to give his exhortation a weight with which nothing else could compare?

It is possible and even probable that these brethren who showed indisposition to work may have taken advantage of the love that flowed to such as were engaged in the ministry of the word. Selfishness could soon find place to look for that love in their own case where no such service was rendered. An eye single to Christ preserves from any snare of this sort or any other, enabling one to detect and deal rightly with the evil where it appears. And the written word, coming from Him Who saw all that was needed from first to last, provides perfectly for every need that could arise, though not without the Holy Spirit, Who alone can guide us according to scripture, and thus manifests our state good or bad. For we are sanctified unto obedience — the obedience of Jesus.

“For even when we were with you, this we charged you, that if any will not work, neither let him eat. For we hear of some walking among you disorderly, doing no business, but busybodies. Now those that are such we charge and exhort in [the] Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread. But ye, brethren, faint not in well-doing. And if any obeyeth not our word by the epistle, mark him to keep no company with him, that he may be ashamed; and count [him] not as an enemy but admonish as a brother” (verses 10-15).

It is a striking characteristic of Christianity that, as in it not one thing is too great or high for the saint, so neither is aught too little or low for God. He concerns

Himself even with a duty so simple and small as a man's working day by day and not sponging on his brethren. Union with Christ is the key to all. If by grace I am one with His Son, no wonder that my Father should take pleasure in opening His heart and mind to me. But for the same reason it becomes a question practically not of mere right and wrong, but of pleasing Him as children, of representing not an honest man merely, nor yet Adam unfallen (were this possible), but Christ. And if we are in Christ on high, Christ is in us here below. Our responsibility flows from these exceeding privileges, which they ignorantly destroy who would reduce us to the footing of Jews, under the law as our rule of life, an error which looks the more fair because it claims to guard moral rights but is in fact subversive of the gospel, and of Christ's glory, and so of all we boast.

Who on the other hand could have thought that pious christian men would be so inconsiderate, to say no more, as to live without working, so selfish as to expect support from those who did work or were living on the fruits of industry? Such was the fact at this time, among the saints in Thessalonica, and the apostle had even forewarned them when he was there. It is a danger which might be anywhere and at any time, but at no time or place more likely than where saints are fresh and simple in the life of Christ: the very blessing exposes to the peril. Among decent men of the world such an expectation would be altogether exceptional if not impossible. The common interests of men all but exclude the thought; their selfishness would resent it as intolerable.

Thus the grace of Christ has its perils as well as its joys, perils on the side of exaggeration no less than of short-

coming. The only security, the only wisdom, the only happiness, is in looking to Christ, Who assuredly leads not to idleness but to earnest service in a lost world. None who looks to Christ could be a drone: if inclined to it, let him not forget the apostolic charge that whoever does not choose to work, neither let him eat. This would be an effectual cure, if faithfully carried out, and are not the saints bound to do so? It is a just and homely way of dealing, no doubt, but the christian is surely equal to the occasion, not less than a Jew or a Gentile. If anything be contrary to Christ, it is the selfishness that would take advantage of grace; and we are called not to honour but to reprove and repress what is so unworthy of the Christian, because it misrepresents Christ.

This idleness was real disorder of walk. And it is an infectious disease which so much the more demands prompt treatment. “For we hear of some walking among you disorderly, doing no business, but busybodies.” Such never was the Master, never is a true servant. For love in a world of misery delights to serve, instead of demanding the service of others, as pride and sloth do. The Son of man came “not to be ministered unto, but to minister.” And in this He is surely a pattern to us; and assuredly the great apostle proved his greatness in this as elsewhere. The idlers at Thessalonica had therefore the less excuse for their idleness. And there was danger of worse, for those who do no business are apt to be busybodies, as the apostle pungently warns them. Leisure from work is time for mischief, and occupation with the affairs of others without a duty is itself mischief.

But here, too, faith works by love; the truth builds up instead of destroying or scattering. Chastening has its

measure, as the end is restoration. “Now those that are such we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread.” The meddlesome effect, as well as its cause, idleness, must be given up. The name of the Lord was incompatible with both; but the apostle beseeches as well as commands. Thus even what nature might teach is bound up with our Lord and Saviour. It is a question of God’s kingdom and not of mere morality, as if we were only men, and grace and truth did not exist in Christ.

But the saints generally are exhorted to go onward in the path of all that suits and pleases Christ. They were neither to be indifferent on the one hand, nor to be stumbled on the other. Disgust at those who walk unworthily is neither grace nor righteousness. It was therefore with a caution to others. “But ye, brethren, faint not in well-doing, and if any obeyeth not our word by the epistle, mark him to keep no company with him, that he may be ashamed, and count him not as an enemy, but admonish as a brother.” It is easy for excellent people to lose heart in doing what is comely and honourable. The dislike of selfishness in others soon produces reaction and repulsion in themselves. The apostle would not have it so, but rather an even and earnest perseverance in all that is fair in the Master’s eyes, whilst dealing plainly with such erring brethren and dishonourable ways. Disobedience was not to be passed by. “Our word by the epistle” was not a word of men, but, as it is in truth, God’s word (1 Thess. 2:12) which also works in those that believe, as it leaves those who slight it worse than before. “We” are of God, the apostles could say; “he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth us not.” “Ye are of God,” say

they to the saints; but let the saints see that they continue to overcome by faith, as they have overcome the power of evil that would have kept them slaves of the enemy. The faith which heeds God's word in the greatest thing will not despise it in the least, nor overlook the unbelief of that man who bears the Lord's name but obeys not the word. It will mark him and avoid his company that he may be ashamed of himself. Is he then put out from the saints, as a wicked person? Expressly the contrary: "count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." He was grievously wrong, and his company refused, but brotherly admonition is the word, not excommunication as if he were an enemy and a wicked man.

It would be unnecessary to say, but for the misleading of great names, that neither the word καλοποιοῦντες in itself nor its usage admits of the sense of doing good in acts of beneficence to others. This on the contrary might play into the hands of those the apostle censures. We must not confound τὸ ἀγαθόν with τὸ καλόν. They occur in the proper and distinctive sense of each in the same context of Gal. 6:9, 10. Honourable and upright practice is the point here.

Further, it might seem incredible beforehand, if one did not know it as a fact, that Luther and Calvin, and men from Grotius down to Winer, though the last hesitatingly and with modification as seeking to heed the article, join in the strange misinterpretation, opposed to ordinary grammar, of taking διὰ τῆς ἐπ. as "by an epistle [to me]!" Bengel with the Aethiopic of the Polyglotts connects the words with σημ. in the sense of stigmatizing him by this letter. But this gives a quite unnatural emphasis to these words, which are thereby

severed from the true and weighty connection with “our word,” and lend an unusual and (I think) undue force to σημ.

Again, Professor Jowett is not justified in taking καί here, instead of ἀλλά. Unaccountable it might seem that his nice and ripe scholarship should thus range itself with the older slovenly school which ever imagined that the inspired men use one word for another. But it is mere ignorance; and to treat it as such is the best lesson for the self-exaltation of theologian critics. The copulative is the true expression; the adversative would have been a coarse weakening of the love, on which the apostle counted. They would know how to temper their correction of the evil-doer. Mr. Jowett would have dealt better with the language of a heathen. His rationalism undermined his respect for Paul, and suggested the self-complacent thought that he knew what the apostle intended to say better than the apostle himself.

The conclusion is in perfect and manifest keeping with all that has gone before. “Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace constantly in every way. The Lord [be] with you all. The salutation by the hand of me Paul, which is a mark in every epistle; so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with you all” (verses 16-18).

The saints, through, faith rescued from the wrath to come, are serving a living and true God, and waiting for His Son from heaven — Jesus raised from the dead. Even “that day” shall not overtake them as a thief: as of the day, they are sober, and have on the armour of light; and, triumphing over death, comfort one another with the bright hope of His coming, when we shall ever be with the Lord. The worst deceit and the destructive

power of Satan have no real ground of alarm for them, though none know so well the character of both in the latter day: still less has the day of the Lord any terror, though misled and misleading man has striven hard to trouble them by a false apprehension about it. But now, delivered alike from hopeless sorrow by the first epistle, and no less baseless fear by the second, their hearts had been comforted and stablished in every good work and word. And the apostle could and did ask their prayers that the word of the Lord might run and be glorified,and His servants be delivered from unreasonable and evil men; as he had also charged them, unweary themselves in well doing, to deal in brotherly faithfulness with disorderly brethren.

It remained only to commend them suitably to the Lord; and this the apostle does in his closing words. In the first epistle he had said “The God of peace himself sanctify you wholly: and may your entire spirit and soul and body be preserved without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,” with the comforting assurance, “Faithful is he that calleth you, who will also do it.” This beautifully fell in with an earlier stage, when these young saints needed to be reminded of God’s will, even their sanctification, as none were more exposed to the snares of personal impurity than the Greeks of that day: an evil peculiarly offensive to the Holy Spirit given to the saints, as the Corinthians were told yet more strongly afterwards. His prayer went well according to the freshness and energy of the Thessalonians, where this hope shone brightly before their eyes.

The second epistle gives greater prominence to the Lord; but holy separateness has no longer such a place given to it. “Now the Lord of peace himself give you

peace constantly in every way." He had looked at disturbing causes both in the world and in the assembly. But greater is He that is in them than he that is in the world, and He that is in the assembly is surely competent to make His gracious and withal mighty presence respected, if looked to, for such as dare to forget it or despair. The Holy Spirit is here to glorify Christ: why then should His own doubt or fear? Why not count on that unspeakable favour of "peace," whatever the natural threats or springs of disquiet?

"The Lord of peace" is a blessed title in which He stands related and revealed to the saints, who might and ought to be assured that He could not fail to act accordingly. For the name of the Lord is the expression of what He is or does; and what is our sense of that which is due to those related to us when they need succour in their difficulties, compared with His unfailing grace?

Nor is this all. "The Lord of peace himself give you peace constantly," or, "at all times." His inspired servant did not wish to raise in their breasts an unwarranted expectation, but had the Spirit of truth directing the desire which, he desired them to feel, was of God. He did even more; not only at all times, but "in every way." Is it possible to conceive a more studied exclusion of every source of alarm at all times, a stronger guarantee of peace from the Lord of peace Himself (and what fountain of peace can match with Him?) for saints of little experience, passing through a world full of trouble at all times, with a predicted period impending of tribulation beyond all precedent?

The apostle directs them to expect it from the Lord "in every way." As they had no time wherein they might not

look to Him to give them peace, whatever may be in its destined season for Jews or Gentiles, so He would give them peace, not in some way only, but “in every way.” How exactly answering to His own words before to the disciples! “These things have I spoken unto you that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” It was the enemy, not the truth, which had alarmed their souls falsely for a while.

There is indeed a singular but easily conceived various reading τόπῳ “place,” for τρόπῳ “way,” in the first hand of the Alex. and Clermont MSS., as well as in the Augian copy (now in Trin. Coll. Camb.) and in the Boernerian (now in the Dresden Royal Libr.) and in two cursives. The Vulgate and Gothic versions represent it; and so apparently Chrysostom, as Montfaucon (not Field) has edited the word. The great Greek commentator has in fact as unduly narrowed the meaning of “peace” as the word in question; for the apostle does not limit his wish to harmony among themselves, but embraces peace in a far higher sense and in all its force. It is therefore an instance not without its instruction, that critics like Griesbach and Lachmann should have the least hesitation in endorsing the ordinary and best attested text: Griesbach marking τόπῳ as possible; and Lachmann actually adopting it as his text. The apostle prayed that peace might be given them in every way, with no mere outward thought of “place.”

This, too, is crowned by “The Lord be with you all:” a wish of small price in eyes which see only a man writing to other men. What is it to those who know by faith God employing a servant under His own unfailing guidance so to communicate His mind and heart to His children

while passing through the world? What avail all other helps, if “the Lord” be not with us all? and why should we not have perfect peace, if He is with us, whoever and whatever else be lacking?

There is another notable link of connection with the close of the first epistle, though each perhaps has, as usual, its own distinctive traits. “The salutation by the hand of me Paul, which is a mark in every epistle: so I write.” How in keeping with a very early communication of the apostle, called to write not a few thus carefully to authenticate his letters to the Gentile saints! Still more solemnly in the first had he adjured the Thessalonians by the Lord that the letter be read to all the (holy) brethren. The notion that scripture, addressed even to the whole assembly, was not to be read to or by all, was an interference with divine authority as well as divine grace, which could only be conceived in a degenerate and rebellious age, verging to apostacy. That Paul’s epistles are, as truly as any other of the holy writings, accredited as scripture, 2 Peter 3:16 makes sure and plain. And it was the more necessary that they should have in all the mark of his hand in saluting the saints, as he usually employed an amanuensis. (Compare Rom. 16:22, 1 Cor. 16:21, and Col. 4:18, with Gal. 6:11.)

Also, the concluding words of the two epistles resemble greatly while they differ sensibly. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with you,” says the first — be “with you all,” says the second. Here we find the more decided emphasis, where and when it was most needed; whilst the same farewell of divine love appears substantially in both.

1 It may be remarked here that not only older scholars like Erasmus and Beza hold to “by” as the true sense in this connection, but Wahl of recent years adds his high authority, as also Matthiae and Jelf allow the principle, and the late Greek Professor Scholefield of Cambridge, though preferring “concerning” from not understanding the argument and context.

2 It would seem scarce credible to intelligent Christians if happily ignorant of the dreary comments written on Scripture, that Dr. Macknight interprets this as “shaken from any honest purpose which they had formed concerning their worldly affairs”! But his translation, popular as the work has been, is as incompetent as his commentary is worldly-minded throughout.

3 Brown’s Christ’s Second Coming, sixth edition, pp. 42-49, 425-433 Elliott’s Horae Apocalypticae, fifth edition, iii. 91 et seqq., iv. 184 - 187.

4 Mr. Mede and Bishop Horsley wrote when the misrendering is “at hand” supplanted “present” to the total darkening of the apostolic argument. The latter in particular quite misconceives the occasion of the Second Epistle, for it was an error, backed up by forgery, about the living saints as it involved in the day of the Lord; whereas the First Epistle corrected the mistake about the dead saints at Christ’s coming, which may not have had any such unhappy source.

5 I am aware that Dr. Whitby, the father of the popular theory of a future reign of the saints on earth without Christ, interprets, as a primary explanation, the π. of Christ’s coming to destroy Jerusalem! and ἐπισ. as the gathering of Jewish converts to Christian churches!! as they often worshipped in the synagogues till that

destruction. Did Paul, Silvanus Timothy, the Thessalonian saints so worship, and so need to be gathered then? The figurative view of blessed facts is false.

6 Tischendorf, in his last edition, and Westcott and Hort follow B, some 9 or 10 cursives, and several ancient versions, etc., in preferring “lawlessness” to “sin” in this phrase.

7 Some years ago use was made of some such version as this, or even the stronger one of “holding fast,” to oppose any application to the Spirit or the church. It was insinuated that the kind of restraint meant is illustrated by Zech. 5:8, i.e., some secret agent of God forcibly constraining, till in his withdrawal the wickedness rises in its strength and the man of sin is revealed. But this sense seems to he changed now.

8 Since. writing these words I find that a Dominican, le Pére Lambert, (in his “Exposition des Prédictions et des Promesses faites à l’Eglise pour les derniers temps de la Gentilité,” ii. 314 - 318, Pans 1806) resorts to a similar distortion of the last clause, “jusqu’à ce que ce mystére sorte de son secret, on paraisse au grand jour.” There is no parenthetic interpolation here, but no less violence is done otherwise to the preceding words, which are actually supposed to mean, “Seulement que celui qui sait maintenant en quoi consiste ce mystère, le retienne bien, jusqu’à” etc. That is κατέχ is taken in three distinct senses in order to banish the true meaning which supposes but one: (1) “ce qui empêche” (ver. 6), (2) “celui qui sait,” and (3) “le retienne bien,” the understood supply (ver. 7). The alternative for ver. 6, “à quoi il tient,” or “ce qui est nécessaire,” would in no way

improve matters. Whether the English writer was indebted directly or indirectly to the older French work is of no moment; but It is of interest to see in both how one false step is apt to involve more, and that the truth is both simpler and deeper than either of these incoherent conjectures.

9 The reading which is so translated here, even if it really implied gradual waste, which it does not, is very doubtful, and “take away” or “slay” is a variant preferred by many, the Revisers included. But the ordinary text means a sudden consumption, as by fire, in Luke 9:54, and so in our verse, were it certain. Even in Gal. 5:16, it is the result in the climax, not the process. The reader of the Greek Bible can compare Jer. 27 (50) 7, Ezek. 15:4, 5, Ezek. 19:12; Ezek. 23:25; Joel 1:19; Joel 2:3; where all but the first means destruction by fire. A few other instances more general might he added. But clearly the Sept. refutes the preparatory and slow process no less than the N. T.

10 The Received Text has ἐν “in” contrary to the best and oldest witnesses; so also in verse 12, though “in” be meant here.

11 It is instructive to weigh the alternative “as first-fruits” instead of “from the beginning” given by the Revisers on the authority of “many ancient authorities.” Indeed, an editor no less celebrated than Lachmann adopted it as the true text in his early as well as his later editions. It differs from that which is generally accepted by but one letter and is supported by the famous Vatican (B) 1209, the Cambridge (F), the Greek of Boerner’s uncial now in Dresden (G) (independent copies probably of an older archetype), and the Porphyrian palimpsest,

seven cursives, the Vulgate, and the later or Philoxenian Syriac with several Greek and Latin ecclesiastical writers as against D E K L (Alford leaving out E, and adding A which is not legible), the mass of cursives, Syr. Pesch., Memph., Arm., Aeth., with Greek and Latin early citations. And Tischendorf was carried away so as to give ἀπαρχήν in his first edition (Lipsiae, 1841), as well as in the New Test. Greek and Latin, and the smaller Greek text dedicated to Guizot (both of Paris, 1842); but corrected the error in his second of Leipzig (1849) and ever since. I say "error"; for the expression is at issue with the surest facts. Of what could the Thessalonian saints be first-fruits? Not even of Macedonia, the Philippians being earlier. Hence the statement is the more untenable, as the phrase is not even thus qualified, and no agreement of the ancient witnesses could have justified it, for it is opposed to truth. But we learn thereby to estimate more justly the facts: (1) that documents of the highest value may be egregiously wrong, through a clerical slip probably; and (2) that editors of the highest repute are liable to be misled, partly through overweening confidence in favourite witnesses, like the Vatican in combination with the Vulgate, partly through natural love of originality, or rejection of what is common.

12 Tischendorf follows F G P, etc., in adding καὶ "also" as Lachmann reads "us," for "you," with A B Dp.m. etc., both, in my judgment, to the detriment of the force and beauty of the text.

13 The "you," ὑμᾶς of the Authorised Version as of the Received Text, wants the testimony of the ancient MSS., Versions, etc., which also restore the true order of the

last clause, it would seem, though not with the same certainty.

14 The omission of the article in the Received Text has no known MS. to warrant it. Erasmus, the Complutensian, and R. Stephens rightly read it; Beza seems to be the bad guide who misled the Elzevirs after the Authorised Translators, who may or may not have noticed it. It is strange that Bishop Middleton did not observe the fact.

15 There is a little good authority (B D L etc.) for omitting “our” Lord Jesus. There is, perhaps, more ground of doubt whether it be “they,” “ye,” or “he,” received; but “they” has unquestionably the best evidence in its favour, “he” of the Revised Text, the least.

16 Ibid.

17 It does seem strange that Alford, Ellicott, Griesbach, Scholz, and Wordsworth should cleave to the received reading, which exaggerates, contrary to, 1 Thess. 2:9. Lachmann, Tregelles, Westcott and Hort rightly (in my opinion) accept the text of H B F G, etc., against the majority.