2 Thessalonians - Commentaries by William Kelly

On 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, On

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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 endeavored 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. ii.-iv. 13; Jer. 30; Joel 2 iii.; 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 judaize 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 Savior, for us who now believe and wait for Him from heaven, would fit in with the prophetic testimony, must have been as yet vague, as 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 Savior'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.

It will be found however that this new work of the devil was not without its effects on the saints, if we may judge by the apostle's manner of addressing them.

“ Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the assembly of the Thessalonians in God our Father and [the] Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace from Go [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; 8:1 • xi. 22; xv. 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 organization was complete, when 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-laborers whom the saints in Thessalonica knew already when the assembly was founded there; and he again characterizes 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 Savior in heaven? “Our” is added here, as compared with the opening formula in the first epistle. Is it 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 labor 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 unconsciously 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 labor 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.

On 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-8, On

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 characterize 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 for his correction of this special error foisted on them, by a just determination of its true nature. 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 likeminded 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 on those that know not God and 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 shineth; 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 the 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 them that hate Him. What then will be His attitude towards 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 labor of love on the part of His children mean while 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 Savior 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, honor and peace will be the portion of every soul that does goof, 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 of 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 in 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; for as yet he and they were exposed to pass through trouble, and their persecutors were for the present in honor 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.

On 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 1:9-12, On

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 (, 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 admired in all that believed) in that day. Whereunto we also pray always for you, that our God may count you worthy of the calling and fulfill 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 though 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, 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 quietly confirms 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 marveled 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, as we see in Rev. 21:23, 24, and the world will 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. The translation of His saints to heaven is one thing; quite another and subsequent is their appearing with Him in judgment.

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, and the ancient versions and Fathers, unless a Latin copy or two. Erasmus seems to have misled Stephens, Beza, and others, and so our Authorized 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 Phloxenian) Syriac, &c., which connect the believing of our testimony with that day, and thus make it future, in flat contradiction of the 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 characterized 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 spiritualizer 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, when Macknight could 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 (1), 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 distinct from the various aspects of His appearing we have just enumerated, but is 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, when rendering vengeance to His enemies and glorified in His saints, is righteous and retributive government in 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 fulfill 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 and work of faith in power. Certainly this could not be, if they were driven from their steadfastness by listening to the delusion 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 fulfills 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 surely in the truth according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ, even as the apostle prayed for his dear Thessalonians. 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 is grammatically a quite possible construction, as it is dogmatically also true in itself, contextual suitability is another matter. That one article in the singular may in Greek designate 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 at all required, though we need “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.

Three Prophetic Gems, Coming and the Day of the Lord, The: Part 1

The Jewish, Christian, and Gentile portions have already been shown in the Lord's prophecy on Olivet. Let us now see what the word of God reveals as to those, of course not born of God, who may bear the Christian name for the present, but will abandon it, as we learn from the scripture before us. No doubt the world comprehends more than those who outwardly profess the Lord's name. Besides Christendom, it embraces the Gentiles or all the nations that are heathen, besides Israel.

Scripture is silent about none of these; and the light of God is as bright and sure on the future as on the past.

This is an immense principle to hold fast in reading the written word. Men are apt to judge of God by themselves. To speak with certainty of the future being to us impossible, man forthwith imagines that, although God speak about it, even then it must be somewhat uncertain. If we only consider a moment, we cannot but learn that this is the, principle of infidelity. What difference does it make to God whether He is speaking about the past, the present, or the future? He assuredly does not “think” in the sense of having to reflect, nor does He merely give an opinion. On the contrary, He knows all things. The only real question can be (as to some a question it is), whether God communicates what He knows, or how far He has been pleased to do so. Does not the prophetic word profess this? Is it well founded? If God has communicated His mind about the future, as evidently the scriptures not only assume but openly assert, it is simply faith to accept all. The moment our faith rests upon His word, the light shines What seemed confusion, when we did not believe, turns to order before our minds when we do. The light was really there in Christ. It was our unbelief that made the darkness and confusion.

The word of God is the perfect revelation of His mind, no matter of what He spoke, or when; and God has been pleased to speak about the future. It is the special mark of His confidence. He told Abraham what He was going to do, what concerned not merely himself but others, even the cities of the plain. With them Abraham had nothing directly to do, though Lot had; yet not Lot but Abraham was told of the imminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot only learned it just in time to be saved, as he was, as by fire. But Abraham, though not in the scene, knew it in peace beforehand, and interceded with God for righteous Lot before his heart. Our portion ought to be that of Abraham rather than of Lot. So there are those of the future who will be saved just in time to escape destruction. They will be in the sphere of judgment, and will pass through it in a measure, but will nevertheless be preserved. The mass will be destroyed for their lawless evil; others too who are unbelieving: “remember Lot's wife.” But a remnant will be delivered, as the angels rescued Lot and his daughters. Theirs, however, will not be the happier portion, but for those on high.

God in fact will have provided some better thing for us in every respect. He has given us the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Accordingly says Paul writing (not to the Ephesians or Philippians, but even) to the Corinthians, “We have the mind of Christ,” the intelligence of Christ, the capacity of spiritual understanding. Not, of course, that even the apostles had the same measure as the Lord, who had and was Himself the wisdom of God, and this absolutely. We have nothing save in and by Him, and hence only in dependence on Him. However, we have not the mere mind of man only but of Christ, as Christians having the Holy Ghost.

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

This, though a digression, is of immense importance on the subject which we are examining; for few things more evince divine intelligence than profiting by the communication of the future. The, Old Testament makes, in the main, this challenge to the false gods: a challenge which could only strike them dumb, even if they had pretended ever so loudly before to give out oracles. As long as it was merely a question of baffling inquirers, they might deceive by equivocal answers; but Isaiah, in the most trenchant and severe style, shows their utter impotence to disclose the future. Now a very large part of the Old Testament consists of revelations of the future, not only of what was future then, but of

what is future still. And the historical part from the first book is cast into typical forms of prophetic character, exhibiting throughout one and the same mind of God. So does the intermediate poetical portion in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

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

When the Lord Jesus came, on whom the accomplishment of prophecy depends for the realization of the kingdom of God—for in truth He was the King who brought in the kingdom in His person, and presented it with final responsibility to Israel—He was rejected. Then came a mighty change of all consequence to the world, when every bright hope seemed blasted, when all expectation of glory for Israel set in clouds and a deeper darkness than before. God made use of that moment of fallen hopes for the earth and the earthly people, and the nations of the world, for “some better thing” He used the cross of Christ to bring in a wholly new state, when Israel vanished for a season—a state distinct from that which prophets prepared the minds of men of old to expect. For their great testimony is to Israel restored and repentant under the Messiah reigning over the earth, blessed itself beyond example and all creatures, and the nations in happy subjection. The reason for a change so unexpected is simple, and the ground when once taken was plain. The rejected Christ is raised from the dead, and, having ascended to heaven, took His seat there to bring in another and heavenly order of blessing. He is seated there until a moment unknown and undisclosed, before which God brings in altogether new things. This is Christianity, which is therefore essentially of heaven. The prophets did not speak of heaven, save incidentally. Prophecy refers to the earth. No doubt there are here and there allusions to heaven; but by no prophet and in no prophecy is there any real, still less detailed, opening out of what the Lord Jesus is doing now as Head of the church at the right hand of God.

It was not the object of prophecy to do so. Prophecy, the prophetic word, is a lamp, and very useful, to which those who love the Lord do well to pay attention, for that lamp shines in a dark or squalid place; and the earth for the present is so. Such is the revealed use of prophecy; and Christianity recognizes it fully. But there is a brighter light, not the day but day-light, as the apostle says, “Till day dawn and a day-star arise in your hearts:"1

What does he mean by this? The accomplishment of prophecy? Not so, but more and better. Till the day of Jehovah comes for the world? In no wise. He speaks of day dawning and a day-star arising in the heart, not of the day arising upon Zion and the world. This would be the accomplishment of prophecy; but he is intimating what the Spirit of God delights to bring into the heart of the Christian now. The Jewish believer was encouraged still to use and value the prophetic lamp. Yea, more: the word of prophecy derived confirmation from what was seen on the holy mountain. Yet there ought to be through the gospel a far clearer light—the light of day, the brightness of heaven, not of the lamp. They as Christians were already to enjoy its effect. But it might now be so with those slow to learn more. Not only were Christians born of God, as all saints are; they were all sons of light and sons of day (1 Thess. 5:5), and are exhorted not to sleep but to watch and be sober, and here to have their heavenly portion made good in their souls. For the person of our Lord Jesus is our hope, the day-star, not merely the general light of heavenly dawn, but the day-star arising in the heart. This is, as I understand it, the arising of the proper Christian hope in the heart. Many then, as now, were lukewarm and came short.

The actual arrival of the day of the Lord is another matter, and this will be in its own time. It was, however, a good thing to hold fast the prophetic lamp, until one gets a better light. There are far brighter associations into which the Christian is introduced now through Christ Jesus; but of these prophecy does not treat. The prophetic word does not contemplate the arising of the day-star in the heart. There it is the very reverse of Christ. The day-star of prophecy is rather the title of the Lord's enemy, as you may see in Isa. 14. The day-star that the Christian ought to have arising within is Christ, while He is outside the world in heaven, before He shines as Sun of Righteousness upon the earth. Day by the gospel dawns, and the day-star or heavenly hope of Christ arises in the heart while he is here, as he enters into Christian privilege by the truth.

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

Hence therefore it is the part of the Christian to judge what is passing around, through communications God-inspired. According to the word it belongs to our proper heritage. The Lord reproached the Jewish chiefs because they were unable to discern the signs of the times. We ought to be able not only to read what is before us according to God, but also to speak of the future with calm confidence, because we believe the word of God. With all that God has communicated we may humbly concern ourselves, as having at heart the family interests; for, if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. It would be unbecoming that the heirs should not make themselves acquainted with the inheritance; and how strange, if Christians indwelt by the Spirit of God could not understand For this reason then, if we only knew our own privileges and depended on the Lord for it in living faith, we should be led into an immense field of blessedness entirely outside the natural ken of man. This is what one may endeavor a little to expound and apply, in looking also at a few of the principal passages that bear upon the prospects of the world according to the scriptures.

Now the Lord, when He was here below, showed clearly what was to befall the earth. He says, “The field is the world;” and He has told us what will become of the world, where men would be Christianized. From the first, He has shown us clearly what would be the result and why so. Good seed was sown; but there was an enemy who sowed bad seed. He does not give us the smallest idea that the bad seed would be

ameliorated. He intimates that the servants were zealous enough to remove the bad effects, but He reproves them. He warns that their effort to correct the evils brought into the field, the attempt to use the name of the Lord, for reforming the Christianized or at most christened world, only issues in rooting up the good as well as the bad, if not more so.

This has been seen habitually in Popery. It is the principle of the reproved servants; but, instead of making the world better, in effect it ends on the contrary in destroying the wheat, rather than the darnel. Babylon, above all evil-doers that ever were, has killed the saints, and made herself drunk with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. This is a matter of divine revelation to every one; and history verifies it as a fact of Rome, not pagan only but papal far more. Scripture had said so long ago; he would be a bold man who would dare to deny it. Yet as of old so now, there are men who live to deny the Bible, and talk of making the world better! This goes along with another fundamental error found in Popery (and far beyond it too), the notion of men getting better themselves. The two delusions go together. The fact is, that Christianity denies both; one's very baptism indeed, rightly understood, denies it, particularly as to man. To be saved one must take the ground of death with Christ to the first man, not of improving him; and he who sees and knows what man is ought never to be drawn into the delusion of the world's improvement. Further, the Lord Jesus implicitly sets aside the latter error when He tells us the nature of the harvest that is at hand. Remember too that the harvest is the end of the “age,” this present evil age, not of the “world.”

When that end or rather consummation comes, there will be a process of discrimination in judgment. The wheat will be removed on high, the darnel consumed below. Consequently then will be the harvest; but this implies evil abounding up to the end of the age. Never will there be a time in this age, when the preaching of the gospel, or discipline however used or abused, can root out the evil sown by Satan from the beginning under the Christian name. It will close by divine judgment on the lawless and all the stumbling-blocks. The new age will be characterized by the Son of man's righteous rule over the earth in power and peace.

In short therefore those who expect the gradual extirpation of evil in this age are in antagonism with the distinct teaching of the Lord Jesus. Far as possible is one from saying this to repress efforts towards winning and edifying souls. It is to be feared that those who yield to such thoughts of their brethren, or at least to such words, are guilty of slander. It is one thing to work in faith, and another to expect the general and true blessing of the world as the result. Granted that this will surely come; but it is reserved for the Son of man. Should the bride of the Lamb be jealous? Such a result is not for the church, which has been verily guilty from early days, dragged down into the snares of the world, into its human activity, its politics, its ease, its honors, its gold and silver, and what not. If Christendom is now suffering the buffets of the world, the world (once eagerly sought by Christians for its own things) is now turning against those who gave anything but true testimony to Christ, and to what a Christian should be. But it will be worse and worse with the world. Ungrateful for whatever of God has been shed around by Christianity, it will turn again and rend her who abuses the name of the Lord for her own selfish and earthly interests. Evil was planted under the pretext of Christ's name, and this evil can never be rooted out until the judgment to be executed at the end of the age. It is presumptuous unbelief to expect or attempt it. The angels dealing judicially are quite distinct from and contrasted with the servants who sow and watch (alas! how poorly) the good seed. It is astonishing how saints continue to confound the two.

We repeat also that the end of the age is not the end of the world. The phrase “end of the world” in Matt. 13:39, 40, is an unequivocal error. There is no scholar who ought not to be ashamed of such a blunder. Far from being the end of the world, the very next verse proves the contrary. The Lord sends His angels and purges from the field or world what is offensive to Him.

The lawless are judged, the scandals removed, the bad crop and the bad fish destroyed. In short the living wicked are punished, and the righteous shine in the kingdom of their Father. The kingdom of the Son of man is the earthly part of the kingdom of God; the kingdom of the Father is its heavenly part, as the Lord explains to any attentive reader. The heavenly things and the earthly things of the kingdom of God (compare John 3:12) will be found then in unsullied brightness and harmony. In the Father's kingdom, according to His own counsels, the glorified saints shine to His own praise. The field or world which had been spoiled by Satan's wiles will be cleared of all its corruptions and their lawless agents. Thus, far from being the end of the world, the harvest which closes this age will be the beginning of the world's going onward in blessedness under the displayed kingdom of the Son of Man and Son of God, the Head of the church which will then be exalted and reigning with Him.

It is the end of the age, the present age while Christ is on high, and does not appear in glory and reign over the earth. There will follow another age, when Christ, instead of being hidden, will be manifested to expel Satan, and remove all that contaminates men and dishonors God. This connects itself with the Old Testament prophets. They all refer to the times of restitution of all things, the kingdom of Messiah over the earth, as the apostle preached to the men of Israel in Solomon's porch (Acts 3:19). The mistake is in applying them to the church now. The principle often does apply in the New Testament, as we all see: no one means to contest this; but there are limits. The fulfillment is another thing.

In the future kingdom there will be not only Jews blessed but Gentiles too as such. Of this truth the apostle avails himself, pointing to the fact of both enjoying the blessings of grace; and this amply suffices to stop the mouth of the Jew. Thus we find the Old Testament applied in Rom. 15:10, “Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people."2 How then could the Jew consistently object? Was it just to fly in the face of their own prophets? Did the Jew not affirm God's blessing on both to be contrary to the Bible? For the Gentiles are certainly blessed no less than the Jew by the gospel; and this the narrow and proud Jew could not endure. Yet the apostle never says that the prophecy is now therefore accomplished to the full or the letter. The principle is true under the gospel; the fulfillment of the prophecy awaits another age, and a different state of things, when Christ appears and reigns in visible power and glory.

In the prophecies we find intimations, not merely of the coming blessedness for all the earth, but of the Jews treated as a rebellious, gainsaying people, while God is calling in those who were not a people. Take the beginning of Isa. 65. The Gentiles are there designated as those who had not known Jehovah, while His people Israel are judged as disobedient. Compare again Hos. 1 with Rom. 9. Thus the Spirit of God gives here and there hints, dim enough once but now clearly interpreted by Him, which should have a partial bearing on the present time. But none of these Old Testament scriptures discloses to us the heavenly glory of Christ at the right hand of God as the center of union to saints on earth, He the Head of one body to the Christians (Jew and Gentile alike). These things compose “the mystery “; none of them is ever developed by the prophets. It was then a secret hid in God.

We have the fact of the Lord sitting at the right hand of God in Psa. 110; but the great use the psalm makes of it is to show that He sits there till His enemies are made His footstool. There is not a word about what meanwhile is being done with His friends. The revelation of the

counsels and ways of God with the latter now is Christianity. The psalm speaks of His sitting there till judgment is executed on His enemies. It tells us also that Messiah is Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek; but it is silent about His present intercession there for the Christian, dwelling plainly on the future execution of judgment when Jehovah sends the rod of Messiah's strength out of Zion.

What the apostle calls the revelation of the mystery is now verified. It is a secret which the Old Testament never brought out, though giving certain intimations that are accomplished, as for instance in calling the Gentiles. For as Moses told Israel, “The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the works of this law.” But the great central truth of Paul is, that the mystery or secret that was of old hid in God concerning Christ and concerning the church is now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets3 through the Spirit; as in fact it was made known to us by Paul himself.

It would be easy to furnish proofs, were this the fitting time. The character of the church supposes that God abolishes at present the difference between the Jew and the Gentile, which the promises and the prophecies kept up. The grand fact of the future is that the Jew is exalted to the first place, and the Gentile blessed but subordinately; so that the old superiority of Israel will be maintained then, however blessed the Gentile may and will be. To deny this is to ostracize the truth, though not quite like the wicked Jehoiakim. In the kingdom they will each be recognized and blessed, but in a different position, not as now when both are made one. It is quite evident that the future millennial kingdom supposes the reinstatement of Israel in more than former favor, and the nations will rejoice, but in a place secondary to that of Israel.

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

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

One may now see clearly, what has been pointed out already, that the Lord Jesus prepared His disciples from the very first not to expect that the economy would, as far as the world was concerned, progress or end in joy and light and blessing. On the contrary, old evils were to go on, and new evils begin and take root from early days by the crafty power of Satan, never to be extirpated till the end of the age. This then is a great lesson taught in the Gospel of Matthew.

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

But much more follows: “There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars, and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, sea roaring and rolling waves, men ready to expire through fear and expectation of the things coming on the habitable earth; for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken,” &c. Some have made the mistake that these scenes also took place when Titus took Jerusalem, but there is no authority for such a supposition. We have had the capture of Jerusalem in verse 20, &c.; after which Jerusalem is trodden down since the siege; and must be till seasons of Gentile come to an end. Here in these and the following verses we are transported into the final scenes. “And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory. But when these things begin to come to pass, look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh.” It is clear that the earth's destruction is not intended, but the blessedness that comes in at the end of the age, when God terminates the time of man's misery, and wickedness, and trouble, and suffering. The coming of the Son of man is never coupled with the dissolution of the world, or its end in any such sense, but with the close of Satan's misrule, and the shining forth of the kingdom of God. For the world there can be no real permanent general blessing till the Son of man comes in displayed power and glory to reign over it to God's glory.

Now we turn to the scripture immediately before us. The statement of the Spirit of God is most explicit. He beseeches the saints by the hope of Christ's presence, who will gather them together unto Himself, against the unfounded rumor that the day of the Lord, the day of judgment for the living, had actually arrived. There is in the A. V. an error of reading, “Christ” instead of “Lord,” and an error of rendering, “is at hand” instead of “is present.” The day of Christ, as in the Epistle to the Philippians 1:10, 16, has different associations from the judgment of the quick. But the mistranslation of the verb is far more important, because it falsifies the bearing of the passage, from which even those who correct it find it difficult to recover. The word means “is present” and nothing else. The true sense seemed so unintelligible, if not incredible, to translators and commentators, that they gave the quite different meaning of “is at hand,” or “imminent.” Many of these could not be ignorant that the same tense in the N. T. imports definitely and invariably elsewhere “present “: see Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 3:22; 7:26; Gal. 1:4; and Heb. 9:9. In all these it unequivocally expresses the then present, and repeatedly in distinct contrast with “at hand” as future, no matter how near. Yet I am not aware of any one before Grotius who pointed out the mistranslation. But that learned and able man was too worldly-minded, too disposed to human ideas, in short too unspiritual, to make any effective use of that observation for intelligence of the passage by clearing away the obstruction to the truth created by an error which perverts the true sense.

Here are the two opening verses of the chapter according to the ascertained ancient text, and correctly translated; for in the Text. Rec. and in the A. V. there are faults in both respects— “Now we beseech you, brethren, by (or, for the sake of) the presence (or, coming) of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in (or, from) your mind, nor yet troubled, either by Spirit, or by word, or by letter as through (or, from) us, as that the day of the Lord is present.” As in ver. 1 there is but one article binding together our gathering and the Lord's presence, the second “by” in the A. V. must therefore disappear. Again, in the last clause of ver. 2 “Christ” is read only in inferior copies and versions; “Lord” is incontestable diplomatically, and alone expresses the true aim. Lesser points we may dismiss.

But there remain the grave questions of rendering in the first verse, and in the second. As to the first, the connection with a verb of entreaty has not been adequately considered, and that connection the peculiar one of a motive from joy and hope to counteract a false alarm. As there is no other instance in the N.T., it is not surprising that the rendering “by” or some equivalent should be unexampled there. So therefore all our older English translations, with the Vulgate and most of the other ancient versions. Wahl in his N. T. Lexicon refers to 2 Cor. v. 20 as another instance of “by;” but the context there favors “for,” in the.sense of “on behalf of” Christ. Here such a force yields not this sense exactly, but “by” or “for the sake of,” as it appears to me for good reason.

As to the true and only legitimate meaning of , there ought to be no doubt. It was a word every day in Attic use, as we may gather from the Clouds (779) of Aristophanes, where it is said of a suit going on, and not merely close at hand.

Can anything be more decisive, outside the N. T., than the technical phrase of among grammarians for the “present tense”? Indeed it is the one and only meaning of the word in the known authors of Greece. Thucydides does not employ this form of the word; but it occurs in Herodotus, Xenophon, Polybius, and Dion Cassius; and in no sense save as actually existing or present. It is the same with the orators Isaeus and Isocrates, Aeschines and Demosthenes. So again the philosophers, Aristotle and Plato, employ it, but in this sense only. It would be easy to add more, but is not this enough? Where is a single instance of “imminent”? It does not occur in the Septuagint save in the Apocryphal writings; but there it occurs in 3 Esdras ix. 6; 1 Mace. xii. 44; 2 Mace. iii. 17; xii. 3, in all which it can only mean “actually there,” nowhere “imminent."1

But say Webster and Wilkinson (G. T.), everywhere else in N.T. means “present “; here, however, it has doubtless (!) the more ordinary classical meaning, “imminence,” to be close” at hand.” Now not only “the more ordinary” but the invariable classical meaning perfectly agrees with its uniform sense in the N. T. The instances adduced by Liddell and Scott (even in the seventh edition of their Greek Lexicon) for “pending” or “instant” really mean what was actually begun or present. And their vacillation in giving both for the same quotation is just like Bengel's, who here says, “great nearness is signified by this word; for is present!”

Exactly so; and therefore great nearness is not meant. They seem all to have been misled by taking for granted that here “imminent” must be intended to make any tolerable sense.

In short the R. V. has here corrected a sure and evident misrendering, which owed its origin to theological error ancient and modern: the assumption latent and unsuspected, that the misrendering alone makes sense here; whereas it alters the meaning of the text and throws the reasoning into confusion. The sense it imposes is purely traditional, and opposed to the truth intended. The bad exegesis was probably what led to the unsound philology.

I am aware that the American revisers, though often right, here cleave to the misconception, and render it “is just at hand “; but can they point to a single case where any correct Greek writer ever employs the verb in this tense save for “present”? Long as the notion has prevailed, it is without foundation in fact.

Further, it is notorious that there is a quite different phrase () for “nearness” in the N. T. and in all other writings; and if emphasis were sought, the verb in the perfect was used (); as also (2 Tim. 4:6). But one had hoped that no exact scholar would sanction the laxity of supposing that the apostle confounds the meaning of two kindred words, each of which has its own precise sense, . “is present,” and . “is close at hand.” On the face of it the erroneous rendering makes the apostle contradict himself; for in Rom. 13:12 he tells the saints that the day is at hand, meaning no other than the day of the Lord, as all surely must admit. How could the misleaders in Thessalonica be charged with error, if they had only taught that the day of the Lord is at hand?

It is thus evident that these divines, like others before them, venture to conceive that the errorists gave out the substantially same thing that the apostle urged later as the truth of God. But no: the false teachers fraudulently alleged the apostle himself, as we shall see, for the untruth that the day of the Lord was (not ever so soon, but) actually arrived. And this error was filling the saints, not with enthusiasm of joy or the excitement of a spurious hope, but with panic, especially as inspiration was pretended, oral word, and even a suppositious letter as from Paul himself for it. Who can deny its effect according to the apostle to be agitation and trouble that the dreaded day was present, and in no way over-wrought warmth about His coming as very near? Thus in every point of view the old rendering is a manifest blunder which would set the apostle at war with himself, as it also conceives a state among the deceived Thessalonians which disagrees with what is clearly described in the same verse. Such a sense is really owing to theological bias, and the assumption (latent and unsuspected perhaps) that the unexampled rendering alone gives sense here. In fact it destroys the text and perplexes the context.

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

The truth does exactly the contrary. It always has for its effect to rouse men from their state of guilty indifference or their self-confidence, setting before them their fearful danger for eternity. But it tells them of a divine Savior and a present salvation. Along with this there is the comforting, establishing, and leading on of the believers into all their privileges and responsibilities, their proper joys in communion with the Lord and one another, and their growth in the knowledge of His mind and ways for worship and service. For all these latter things pertain to

the believer only.

It is striking in more ways than one, how John Howe (Works, v. 252, Hunt's ed. 1822) felt in his measure the force of this appeal, and commended it to others. “You shall hardly meet with a more solemn, earnest obtestation in all the Bible than this is: that is the thing I reckon it so very remarkable for. ‘I beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ;' by what he knew was most dear to them, and the mention whereof would be most taking to their hearts; if you have any kindness for the thoughts of that day, any love for the appearance and coming of our Lord; if ever any such thoughts have been grateful to your hearts: we beseech you by that coming of His, and by your gathering together unto Him, that you be not soon shaken in mind, that you do not suffer yourselves to be discomposed by an apprehension, as if the day of Christ were at hand. It may be thought very strange, why the apostle should lay so mighty a stress upon this matter, to obtest in it so very earnestly. And really I could not but think it exceeding strange, if I could be of the mind, that the coming of Christ here spoken of were only the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, and that the man of sin afterward spoken of were only meant of Simon Magus and his impostures, the feats that he was at that time supposed and believed to do; which certainly could be things of no such extraordinary concernment unto them that lived so far off as Thessalonica at that time, and much less to the whole Christian church.”

Not that Howe had any special light of scripture on the glorious counsels of God for Christ and the church. No Puritan was instructed in these truths more than Greeks, Romanists, Anglicans, Lutherans, or others; and his adoption of independency injured his intelligence of the church, as it must all Congregationalists in particular. But he was beyond comparison the most spiritual and profound of his class. At any rate I here quote him to show how a soul who loved the Lord and His word rose above the prejudices of his fellows, and that addiction to Plato, Plutarch, and other heathen, to which the Cambridge school of philosophic divines such as Cudworth and H. More, helped him. Though confused like all the rest as to the distinction of the Lord's Presence, and its appearing (or, the day), his logical and subtle mind could not overlook that the ground of the apostle's appeal in verse 1 was laid in the brightest hope and the deepest affections of the saints. Now this is peculiar to the Lord's presence for gathering His own unto Himself, as distinct from the subject treated of in the verses of chap. i. that precede, and in the verses 2 &c. of chap. ii. that follow.

The rendering of the Revisers, and many others, is avowedly because they assume that the apostle is entreating the saints in verse 1 in respect of what he had been just writing and was about to teach them more, for which would be the correct preposition, as we may see in John 17 and elsewhere. But if he besought them, as I am persuaded he did, by their joyful hope against the false notion of the day with its terrors as actually come, it is no mere question of the sense of here required, important as this is in such a context, of which there is no parallel known to me in the N. T. In other words, what led to the choice of “touching” here was an erroneous exegesis of the verse in which the preposition occurs. Had the real difference been seen, all would have acquiesced, if not in the “by” of the A.V. with most translators till of late, in the nearly equivalent for “the sake of,” which is its frequent usage.

What were those about who misled the Thessalonians? They pretended to Spirit, and word, for their cry that the day of the Lord was come. False teachers fall into such ways. But these did more; growing bolder in their impiety they pretended to have a letter of the apostle, affirming that “the day of the Lord was present.” I am aware that some learned and able men have conceived that they only alluded to the former Epistle. Thus Paley 2 says that the apostle writes here, among other purposes, to quiet their alarm, and to rectify the misconstruction that had been put on his words; in that the passage in the Second Epistle relates to the passage in the first. But this is an oversight. It is certain from the terms employed that the epistle alluded to was not his; for he says “that ye be not soon shaken in your mind or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter AS from (or, through) us.” He thus intimates, not the letter that he had written, but a letter “as by us,” or purporting to be from us, with which he had nothing to do. It was a forged letter, not his First Epistle which we have.

The pretended letter was to the effect that the day of the Lord was (not “at hand” merely but) already there. Now the day of the Lord, according to the Bible in general, is to be one of trouble and anguish, a day of clouds and darkness for the world. You may read this abundantly in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, and the prophets generally. On what pretext then was the cry raised by the forger? The Thessalonians were suffering great trouble and persecution for the truth's sake. Indeed the apostle had in 1 Thess. 3:4, 5, expressed his concern lest the tempter might tempt them somehow through the tribulation they were passing through. But he gives no license for calling it the day of the Lord. The false teaching seems to have converted this (the existing fact of much trial) into that day, alleging that the day of the Lord was actually arrived. For in the O. T. certainly the “day of Jehovah” is repeatedly applied in a partial or incipient sense, e.g., in Isa. 13; 19, &c. All there indeed knew from 1 Thess. 5 that it would be a day of fearful trial, everything meanwhile growing worse and worse, till the evil is at length put down by the victorious power of the Lord.

Accordingly the apostle in 2 Thess. 1 points to the revelation of the Lord from heaven, with angels of His might, in flaming fire rendering vengeance to those that know not God (the Gentiles), and to those that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (wicked Christians or Jews, &c.), when He shall come [not to take up the saints for the heavenlies, but] to be glorified in His saints, and to be wondered at in all that believed.... “in that day.” Why fear it then?

On this occasion the misleaders had contrived to excite no little anxiety and trouble as if the day of the Lord had actually come. Not at all, says the apostle: how can you forget the bright hope that the Lord is coming to gather you to Himself? “We beseech you, brethren, by (or, for the sake of) the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to him, that ye be not soon shaken in your mind nor troubled.” He thus appeals in ver. 1 to a known motive of joy and confidence in their hope; and from ver. 3 he goes into the prophetic reasons which demonstrate its complete refutation. But, we may notice, it is never said that the saints await the day of the Lord to be taken up and meet Him in the air. The coming of the Lord effects their translation before His day as we shall see.3 They are to be an object of wonder in that day when seen glorified with Him.

Thus “the presence of the Lord” and “his day” represent two connected but different thoughts often confounded by men: the one (being said of the heavenly saints) consummating grace, the other executing judgment. There is the less reason why they should be, because the apostle had already spoken with clearness on them both in his First Epistle. In chap. iv. 15-17, he describes the coming of the Lord, not His day. “For this we say to you in the Lord's word, that we the living that remain (or, are left) unto the presence of the Lord shall in no wise precede those put to sleep. Because the Lord Himself with call of command, with archangel's voice, and with trump of God, shall descend from heaven; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then () we the living that remain shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in [the] air; and thus we shall ever be with the Lord.” This was a new revelation, as he implies in opening the subject (15). Not such was the day of the Lord; for there is scarce any great topic more frequent in the O. T. prophets from Isaiah to Malachi. Even where this phrase may not be

employed, it is involved habitually. But in no case did it make known what the Thessalonian saints are here taught by the apostle. They are distinct truths.

Hence having finished the statement of the new truth at the end of chap. 4, the apostle turns to the old in the beginning of chap. 5 “But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that ye should be written to” [what a contrast with the foregoing new revelation!] “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. When they may say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall in no wise escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness that the day should overtake you as a thief,” &c. Is it possible to conceive a sharper distinction? We see on its face what a mighty difference there is between “the coming of the Lord” and “the day of the Lord,” as the apostle describes them. Where among ancients and moderns does one find the same discrimination? or anything but the grossest confusion? Chrysostom had not his equal among the Greek fathers as an expositor; yet he (was he the first?) was so dark as to count death the Lord's coming to the saint! If it was, how many thousands of times He must have come! No, it is just the inverse: our going to Him, not His coming for us, when all saints up to then departed, and we the living that remain, are caught up to meet Him in the air. That is “the day of the Lord” comes later; His presence is to our everlasting joy, our great triumph over death, as the day is His unsparing judgment of the wicked quick. How astonishing that any saints should lump them in one!

This is confirmed by what was written some time after to the Corinthian Church in their First Epistle, xv. 51, 52. “Behold, I tell you a mystery: we shall not all be put to sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in an eye's twinkling, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” The resurrection he does not call “a mystery,” when he wrote of it in this 'very chapter. Nor was it justly one; for the O. T. had revealed it. The early book of Job tells us the resurrection of man (14.); not only the privileged one of the just in chapter 19., but that of “man,” who must die and rise; yet not till the heavens be no more, in perfect accord with the two resurrections of Rev. 20. There is no “mystery” in the two resurrections. It was a truth for both just and unjust, which the Jewish adversaries also received, as Paul told them before Felix the governor. But the coming of the Lord, not only to raise the dead saints, but to change the living, and translate both to Himself, is the fresh word of the Lord in 1 Thess. 4 and the “mystery” in 1 Cor. 15.

Thus the Lord's coming with His saints was a truth announced by Enoch and again by Zech. 14:5. This was not a mystery, therefore, more than their resurrection. It is repeated in 1 Thessalonians 13, and elsewhere in the N. T. The “mystery” is in His coming for them as in 1 Cor. 15:51, 1 Thessalonians 4:13, &c., in order that they might come with Him as well as for other ends.

One of these objects for the earth which appear to have made the rapture to heaven requisite is the divine purpose to prepare a people here below for the Lord at His appearing. As grace had by the gospel and in the church brought in suitably for each the call of Gentiles to rejoice with His people, God would still work for a remnant from both during the frightful crisis when He would fill with His chastening judgments, which culminate in the Lord's personal infliction when He comes to judge and reign. The Psalms and the Prophets shed much light from God, especially on the godly remnant of the Jews, working by His Spirit on their hearts before and during the great tribulation. The evidence is so abundant that, if this were the time to furnish proofs, the difficulty would be which to select effectively to convince those to whom this side of the truth is not familiar. The Revelation is as plain at the end of the N. T., as the Gospel of Matthew at its beginning, that there is to be a wave of blessing for Jews and Gentiles during that brief and awful space, after the Christian witnesses are withdrawn and seen in heaven. Take Rev. 7 and xiv. as distinct testimonies to this, along with the fact that there is no longer a hint of a church on earth, and that a new sight is beheld above, the twenty-four crowned and enthroned elders, who, as is generally allowed, represent in symbol the saints of O. and N.T. in heaven round God and the Lamb. “The things which are” will then be past, and “the things which are about to happen after these” will be next accomplished.

Three Prophetic Gems, Coming and the Day of the Lord, The: Part 3

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

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

There is also one evident reason on the heavenly side which calls for the heavenly saints to be with the Lord above before He and they are manifested in glory. Each of us shall give an account concerning himself to God. We shall therefore all be placed, though in differing times and for opposite ends also, before the judgment-seat of God (Rom. 14); and it is to Christ personally that we shall then bow. For we must all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ, that each may receive the things [done] through (or, in) the body, according to those he did whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5). Now this will evidently take place for the saint in his glorified state (and what a comfort this will be, however solemn!), but as evidently before the Lord comes in His kingdom; for the respective place of each in the kingdom is determined by that manifestation of us to Christ. How very striking it is that the glorified saints are shown as perfectly at home above in God's presence, from Rev: 4 to 19, during the sad season of earth's greatest darkness and abomination and misery; and that only before the bridals of the Lamb come we hear of His wife making herself ready! Can anyone suggest anything but that manifestation to Christ as needful for her? Then the marriage of the Lamb is followed by His appearing and His saints with Him. They had been caught up and in the Father's house long before, as is evident.

It is only lack of spiritual perception which has pitched on the Lord's coming or presence in one particular form to deny it in others equally but distinctly revealed in scripture. There are three applications of His presence at three separate occasions—to the Christians, to Israel, and to the Gentiles. Even the hottest partisans for merging all in one must on calmer reflection allow that Matt. 24:31 wholly differs from that in Matt. 25:31. The latter is severed from the former by an interval of some, and probably from the nature of the case considerable, length. If the Jews, or Israel rather, be thus plainly dealt with before the Gentiles, it is the right order for the earth. But proof is at least as strong that the Lord's first and highest object is to receive to Himself on high those destined to be with Him where He is in the intimacy of divine love and heavenly glory, as well as to reign over those delivered Jews and saved Gentiles.

Ample proof is given in scripture that the heavenly saints take precedence and are caught up to be with the Lord for the Father's house before these Jews or Gentiles on earth are converted. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so surely is Christ's taking His bride above; and this, because Christ's rejection by Jews and Gentiles on the earth gave occasion to God's highly exalting Him above after a new sort. To rail at this clear truth of God as “a new god come newly up,” “as a Jewish fabrication,” with many another equally childish, unfounded, and unseemly imputation, must be treated as at best mere and impotent ill-feeling.

The ignorance too is fathomless; as, for instance, the impossibility of “preaching the gospel [of the kingdom] to the world while actually keeping satanic saturnalia.” It is the Lord who predicts this very fact at the very time, “before the end,” when Satan, the Beast, and the False prophet prevail. Can any instructed Christian deny it? See where a false system leads its votaries.

Those who assume the identity of the Lord's presence here with that in Matt. 24 and kindred scriptures would do well to weigh what has satisfied their brethren that they refer to distinct acts, and differ in nature, each with its own personal object, the latter for the earth and the former for heaven. That there will be points of resemblance between them is natural, because their respective objects are to be blessed after a new and wondrous sort above and below. But ours will be by a rapture on high characterized only by grace; theirs by a judgment that overwhelms their enemies below. In 1 Thess. 4 none are spoken of but the risen and changed saints to be with Him, then and always. Only those are concerned who hear His call, and, seeing Him as He is, are henceforth like Him, their body of humiliation transformed into conformity to His body of glory. In Matt. 24. it is a question of “flesh” being saved through the antecedent perils, without a hint of resurrection or change when they see the Son of man, for it is in this character He appears. And then shall all the tribes of the earth or land mourn, which is plainly foreign to 1 Thess. 4 “And they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory;” yet nobody then is said to be changed by it. On the contrary after this He is said to send His angels with a great sound of trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect (from context here, of Israel) from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other: a description widely differing from the heavenly saints changed and caught up to Him on high, as in 1 Cor. 15, Phil. 3, and 1 Thess. 4.

But Col. 3:3, 4 goes farther and positively excludes Matt. 24 from the possibility of being classed with these scriptures. For it definitely lays down, that there is no appearance of the Lord to any alien eye of all mankind, when He comes for His joint-heirs, till they are already changed and manifested with Him. Whenever Christ, our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also be manifested with Him in glory. Till then our life is hid with Christ in God. When He appears, we (are not caught up, but) appear with Him in glory. How God-fearing men can refuse submission to the evidence of His word in distinguishing these two acts of the Lord's presence might well seem beyond belief, if we did not know the fact, and its sorrowful consequence, both in its darkening power on the subject generally, and in the sore feeling it engenders.

Do you doubt that this is so? Hear then some words of an aged and respected clergyman: “Are the scriptures in these days tortured by any evangelical believers? wrested, at least, to their own injury? in union with scorners or heretics? What degree, &c., exists of the temper that God loves, of trembling at His word? &c. Are there in these last days any supplemental addenda to the Holy Word to be received as God's revelation as the book of Mormons is received? Was the faith once for all delivered to the saints? or was it not? “Do I wish to give pain to him or his friends who have deemed such utterances becoming or justifiable? Not in the least degree, more than they affect one with other feelings than sorrow for themselves, and a solemn sense of the false teaching which produces such bitter fruits, utterly out of measure, place, and season. For they know that we are no neutrals in divine truth, but appreciate the strongest indignation where Christ and His work are assailed, or any other vital truth. Another fact is clear. The apostle had in 1 Thess. 5 explained the contrast of “the day” with “the presence” or coming of the Lord for His own. The latter was a new revelation which they had not known before. As to the former, they knew accurately that it comes as a thief in the night. Whenever they may say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as the throes upon her that is with child, and they shall in no wise escape. But the apostle's assurance is distinct that this was for the sleeping world, not for sons of light and day as they all were. Hence it was as inexcusable, for the Thessalonian saints to listen to the fraudulent alarm of their misleaders that the day of sudden destruction had arrived, as for others who to our day confound these two things so different, the joyful meeting of the Savior and the saved above, and the day of terrible destruction on the men of the world. It is this confusion that underlies the misrendering of in 2 Thess. 2:1, and of in 2:2.

Nearly all teachers take for granted that in the former the apostle alluded to that concerning which he was about to teach them. It is, on the contrary, an appeal to the comforting hope of the Lord's coming and their gathering together unto Him, as a motive for rejecting the false teaching about His day. Further, from ver. 3 he shows the prophetic grounds why that day, not His coming, could not arrive till the evils were fully and openly out which are to be then judged. The Revisers, like Bp. Ellicott and Dean Alford, have corrected ver. 2; but they left ver. 1 worse than in the A. V.

Again, it is urged with unwarranted confidence, that the saints only go up into the air to meet the Lord there, and forthwith come down with Him. For this where is any attempt at proof? They may press into the service Matt. 24:31. But this demonstrably applies to the gathering of the elect of Israel after the Son of man is seen coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. In this connection there is no hint of the resurrection nor yet of the translation above.

As this chapter of Matthew has been examined rather closely of late, there is the less need for discussion now. But Col. 3:4 seems plain and conclusive that the words of Matthew do not and cannot legitimately apply to the risen saints. For the apostle there lays down that “when Christ, our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also (not be caught up, but) be manifested with Him in glory.” The reference of Matt. 24:31 cannot be to the glorified ones spoken of by Paul. For this Gospel treats of elect Israelites gathered from all parts of the earth to the Son of man after His manifestation; the apostle treats beyond doubt of Christians manifested along with Christ in glory when He who is now hidden is manifested. In short, the Epistle excludes all question of Israel here, as all would admit, and means only the saints changed into the likeness of Christ's glory; whereas the context of the text in the Gospel is occupied with the future saints of the chosen people on the earth, and has

nothing to do with the risen for their rapture or their manifestation with Christ. The earthly people are in view, and the Son of man coming to judge and establish His kingdom here below.

Nor is this by any means all. In the latter half of Rev. 19 we have the beginning of the day of the Lord (or the presence of the Son of man). It is the prophetic description of what the apostle briefly sketched in 2 Thess. 2:8, when the Lord Jesus shall destroy the lawless one with the breath of His mouth and shall annul Him by the appearing of His coming. As to this there can be no fair question. But here we are told, not of the saints being caught up to meet the Lord in the air, but of the armies in heaven following the Lord when He emerges to judge and make war in righteousness. That those armies are saintly and not angelic (though angels are not to be wanting then) is clear, among other proofs of special association with Christ, from their garb of “white pure byss” (just before interpreted as “the righteousnesses of the saints”). The glorified saints therefore follow the Warrior-King out of heaven: a truth which had been already and necessarily implied in Rev. 17:14 of which more will be said anon.

Indeed, the just preceding scene (19. 6-9), the marriage supper of the Lamb beyond controversy in heaven, proves still more strongly, that the saints who form the Bride were already there; and if the evidence be traced in the book, they are seen there from chaps. 4, 5, where they are symbolically shown to be. For who but the least intelligent can think of separate spirits being seated on thrones? So little is it scriptural to say as in a little tract on “The Time of the End,” that “when His presence—His Parousia—as announced by Himself is ‘seen like the lightning from the east even to the west,’ the wedding feast shall be kept.” No, my brother, prejudice and passion have misled you. The marriage is in heaven and before that day. Dare you deny it in flat contradiction of God's word? Tremble for yourself, and beware of such temerity.

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

The coming of the Lord then is bound up closely with the gathering of the saints; the day of the Lord as clearly with the judgment inflicted on His enemies here below. Hence we find here, “let no man deceive you by any means.” It is evident there might be a great deal of mistake on this subject; “for it [will not be] except there come the falling away (or apostasy) first.” “That day shall not come” is an insertion of our translators, marked therefore by italics, though substantially correct. The day was not to be till the apostasy have first arrived, the public abandonment of Christianity throughout Christendom. O how men deceive themselves when they think that all goes on to progress and triumph for the gospel or the church through existing means!

Victory will be when Christ comes, not before. What is revealed is a very different and more humbling prospect. God's distinct intimation is that “the day” is not to be except the apostasy come first. And what is the character of modern infidelity, but preparing the way for the apostasy? people bearing the Christian name, yet giving up all the Christian substance? leaders who still carry on the dead forms while the spirit has fled? This will grow and extend, and men little think that they rapidly get ready for it. The outward and public recognition of the truth is being destroyed everywhere on earth. There will soon be no outward homage paid to Christianity in Europe.1 It is too plain that the governments of the world are gradually stripping off all real respect for the Bible as God's revelation, even if they yet keep up their connection with the Christian name. How many even in England think this a great boon! Though without practical interest in or affinity for an established religion, I cannot but think its rejection criminal and profane; and that this will turn out more serious than the so-called reformers expect.

It was a most seductive evil when the Christians accepted an alliance with the world; but it is a totally different and most solemn issue for the world, when it casts off all its profession of Christianity. Deep was the Christians' loss when they sought the world's recognition; but what an awful day for the world when it is so tired of the union as to throw off Christianity! The consequence will be that the very slender tie which binds and attaches men severally to the reading of the Bible or attending service will be broken. Granted that there is no reality, no divine life, no true or acceptable honor paid to the Lord, in carrying on a merely outward profession; but people who go to church (as it is called) hear the word of God and Christ named with honor. When this is no longer recognized, they will give it up as an antiquated prejudice, and go to shoot, fish, ride, or drink on His day. They will occupy themselves in reading anything but the Bible. The most rapid decay will ensue. Not so with the elect of God. As the evil progresses, the real saints will then become the more evident. They will by the Holy Spirit rest only on the word of God and such testimony of Jesus as is then rendered; but unbelieving men will be engulphed in the apostasy.

Is not this what is before the world as its doom? Is it not the written word which says so? What is the worth of any human forecast? Men prefer to look for a pleasant prospect, because they dislike and dread the divine warning. But this unbelief only hastens the evil day.

The first Epistle to the Thessalonians was the first written by the apostle; the second, from the nature of the case, was written shortly after. Thus, from the beginning of revealed Christianity, from the first communications of the Spirit of God to the churches, such is the solemn result of which they were warned. Those who profess the gospel will abandon it ere the end come as it surely will. For that day is not to be “except there come the falling away first.” It is not merely “a” falling away here, and a falling away there, but the falling away, the apostasy in the fullest sense.

Further, “That man of sin will be revealed, the son of perdition.” There was once a man of righteousness, the Savior; but He was rejected. There will be a man of sin, the son of perdition, “who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped.” We are aware that many people apply this to the Pope of Rome. Now we cannot honestly accept this, though regarding the system as a frightful delusion, even Babylon. How can men believe that “the apostasy” has arrived yet?2 It is a sorrowful thing even unconsciously to use scripture with a party aim, or for controversial objects. In the presence of growing evil, which pervades both Protestant and Catholic countries alike, it is beneath the truth to cast such a stone from one to the other. No, the apostasy is the result of despising the gospel, of trifling with the truth, of keeping up forms that are unreal, and then rejecting them and all divine revelation with shame, or without it, in cold, proud, reckless, and definite unbelief.

The apostasy will be the result as far as Christendom extends. Wherever the gospel has been preached, or at any rate the Lord professed, the apostasy will be the issue, whether of Romanists (for none are really Catholics) or Protestants” whether of Lutherans or of Calvinists, Greeks, Nestorians, or any others; such will be the result, not outside but within Christendom. It does not mean the end of the Jews, or of the heathen. The apostle is here speaking of that broad scene wherein the Lord's name has been professed. No doubt Papists are now and long the most

opposed to the gospel and the most persecuting in spirit; and therefore Protestants assume that theirs is the apostasy But not yet is it come for Christendom to abandon openly and avowedly the N. T. as a falsehood and the Savior as an impostor. It is surely coming for Protestants as well as Papists, and all the rest. The day which is to judge the lie, and worse still, cannot be till all is fully out. “Because [it will not be] except the falling away shall have first come, and the man of sin been revealed.”

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

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

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

Those who are under the impression that the apostasy is already consummated, and that it is thus found in Romanism, do not assuredly think worse of it than myself, who may speak without presumption of being farther from its evil dogmas, forms, ways and worship, than they even profess. But, while we utterly abhor the Papist system, scripture, and the chapter before us with others, speak of a still more awful revolt from the gospel, the church, the Christ, the Trinity and of God's revelation as a whole before the end comes, or even the revelation of the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus is to destroy, personally appearing for this purpose though for other blessed objects.

Under that impression they consider that the Papacy is this adversary and enemy, of course a succession during the centuries, and not the haughty individual antagonist of Christ, the last antichrist of John's Epistles, who denies the Lord Jesus as the Christ, and yet more as the Son, and of course the Father, both the hope of Israel and the truth of Christianity. Hence they adopt the view of the Fathers from Irenaeus to Cyril Hier., Chrysostom, and Theodoret, &c., among the Greeks, and to Tertullian, Augustine, Jerome, Lactantius, &c., among the Latins, that the Roman empire is the restraining power, which when broken would leave all open for the man of sin. There is however this great difficulty for the Protestant view, that the Fathers with one consent looked for a single personage to fulfill this and other predictions, to be destroyed by the Lord, the son of perdition by the Savior, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Dr. Wordsworth makes much of Chrysostom's remark that, if the apostle had meant the Holy Spirit when he speaks of the power that restrained, he would have spoken plainly and said so. This is a hasty supposition; as it is hardly decorous to predicate why the apostle, or the inspiring Spirit rather, refrained from giving all that man might wish. It is assumed by him, like the Fathers and the moderns too, that the restraining means was some power which Paul had mentioned to them by word of mouth; that he practiced reserve concerning it in writing; and that the reason for this oral mention only must have been fear of the consequence from the empire for himself and his brethren if he had written of it openly in scripture.

But this reasoning is quite unfounded, and no bad instance of the slovenly way in which the scriptures are read and pressed into service. The apostle does not say that he had often spoken to the Thessalonians of the restraining power, or that he had told them what it was. He speaks in ver. 5 of what he had said of the coming apostasy, and of the man of sin, with his blasphemous assumption and defiance of God in His very temple. “Remember ye not that, being yet with you, I told you of these things?” It is after this that in ver. 6 he goes on, “And now ye know that which restraineth, that he may be revealed in his own season.” He does not say that he had mentioned or explained the restraining power to them, but that they knew that by its action the man of sin could not be revealed till his own season. They may have gathered it from the known place of the Holy Spirit as exercising power for good.

But without dwelling more on this, let us test the notion with what scripture does say of the time when there is no restraint more. When that evil hour arrives, the powers that be, at least as far as the Roman earth is concerned, will no longer be ordained of God. The dragon will give its emperor its power and his throne and great authority (Rev. 13:3). For the ten horns, his satellites, as they receive authority as kings for one and the same hour with the Beast (the symbol of that Empire in its last form), so also have one mind and give their power to the Beast (Rev. 17:12, 13). And Beast and False Prophet perish awfully together, as do the kings and their armies. The Fathers were right in seeing portentous personages with their followers, not a succession in history, but the divine judgment at the close, coming into collision with the Lamb appearing from heaven to their destruction. If the Beast that rises from the abyss were now and for more than a thousand years in power, there could be, where his influence extends, no powers ordained of God. This will follow when the restraint is gone. The Roman empire is long gone; but He that restraineth is still here. And He will restrain, till the moment comes for that very empire (which existed when the apostle wrote, and ceased to be as now for so many centuries) to emerge from the abyss, and is to be ordained of Satan on its revival, to its everlasting destruction.

So far from the truth of God is that patristic tradition as a scheme. Yet, as a passing fact, it is true that while the Empire was in power, God owned it, heathen though it was; and the restraint still wrought. But the Empire fell in the fifth century; and the man of sin did not yet rise. God's providence wrought, and owned in His providence the Teutonic hordes, and the kingdoms which took the shattered empire's place, as He did the Romans before, and does the powers that be still. The restraining power still works, and will till the dreaded time when the church joins her Head for heavenly glory. For a while too after that event the Holy Spirit will work and control, according to the Apocalyptic expression of “the seven Spirits of God sent into all the earth.” For it is only in the latter half of the unfulfilled seventieth week of Daniel, the 1260 days of which the Revelation treats, that Satan plays that terrible game on earth, when he sets up the Beast, and the man of sin sits down in God's temple.

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

The truth of the Spirit governmentally restraining meanwhile may have been known to the Thessalonian saints in a general way, but not written down for wiser and better reasons than any dread of the Roman government. Daniel had already given its destruction, as foreshown to Nebuchadnezzar in chap. 2:34, 35, 40-44, and to himself in chap. 7:7, 8, 19-26; as it was yet more fully in Rev. 13; 14, 16, 17, 19, after the death of the apostle Paul, so that the dread imputed to the inspired writer can scarcely stand its ground.

At most the Roman empire may be said outwardly to have hindered the uprising of the last imperial adversary, because it was ordained by God as all powers are till Satan's short time, when he is permitted to ordain him. The traditional view has proved imperfect when examined in the light of scripture. It was a narrow and short-sighted application, in no way meeting what the word elsewhere says and demands, but provisionally true while the Empire held its place. “The son of perdition” suits the personal antichrist, not a succession of pontiffs, not a few of whom were the vilest of men, and the office itself an imposture. But to characterize the succession as denying the Father and the Son is not merely uncharitable but senseless. Why strain scripture derogatorily to God and dangerously for the man, however sincere and well-meaning, who is guilty of such a license? When the man of sin appears, there will be no doubt about it for all who have the fear of God.

The truth is that the old traditional view is not only unfounded as a question of full truth; it is also manifestly illogical. For if the Roman empire were the absolutely real barrier against antichrist, and the Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries prayed for its continuance against that dreaded foe, what could be in such a declaration, however open, to arouse its hatred and draw out persecution? It would naturally tend, if known, to give them confidence in the church as the warm and not quite disinterested supporter of the empire before God. It is extraordinary that men so able as Dr. W., and a crowd of others who are no friends of tradition as he was, should use an argument so suicidal.

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

Further, being both a power and a person (that 4 is, spoken of as neuter as well as masculine) it is not rightly said of an empire, and can apply to none so well as to the Spirit of God. He still, to sustain His testimony to Christ, and for the sake of the children of God, continues to hinder the final manifestation of Satan's power. But when the church is gone up on high, it seems that the Spirit will act not only to convert souls, but as a spirit of government (Rev. 6) till God allows Satan to do his worst for his short time. The Spirit of God will then indeed cease to restrain the working of the Evil One, who will dare all things against the Lord.

“And then shall the lawless one be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall destroy with the breath of his mouth, and shall annul with the appearing of his coming.” The Lord Jesus is the appointed destroyer of this fearful being, the one who is elsewhere called the antichrist. Even now there are many antichrists, says John; when the antichrist comes, he will be brought to naught by the Lord Jesus in person appearing from heaven and publicly. The critical addition of “Jesus” is put in, because it is certainly genuine; and as it gives more definiteness to the expression, so it excludes any mere dealing in providence.

Here recall the first verse. The apostle does not say the day of the Lord, nor the appearing of His coming, when Christ gathers the saints. “We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto him.” And these two wondrous events are so closely associated by one article in the Greek, that the second “by” in the A. V. is an impertinent and injurious intrusion. But, when the destruction of the man of sin is in question, he speaks, not of His coming merely, but of the appearing, the epiphany, of His coming If it were a display when the Lord comes to gather His saints, why should “the appearing” of it be expressed in ver. 8 only? Why is its “appearing” avoided when He comes (ver. 1) to gather together His saints to Himself? Is it not manifest from the phrase itself that the coming of the Lord does not of itself imply His appearing? How else account for the difference in the wording of verse 8? It was necessary, when His appearing was meant, to say so; and this is when He judges. When it is the dealing of His grace in translating us to heaven, His coming or presence is named; but not a word about His appearing. When the lawless one shall be destroyed, it is not merely His presence or coming, but the appearing of it. He could not appear without coming; He might come without being seen beyond what He pleased; but now we hear of the display of His presence. When He comes to take up His saints, what will the world have to do with it? It was His own love which saved them. They belonged to Him, not to the world. He comes to claim His own. He does not make the world a spectator before He appears in glory for the destruction of the antichrist.

Three Prophetic Gems, Coming and the Day of the Lord, The: Part 4

ALAS! we are told in terms of uncalled for vehemence that in no school of French or German rationalism is there a bolder subversion of the predictions of God than in this fable! that 1 Thess. 4:16, with of course 2 Thess. 2:1 (which, as all admit, synchronizes), is, or could be, unheard by the world. But where is, or what implies, the world here? The apostle is showing how God will bring with Christ the departed saints. The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a call of command (), with archangel's voice, and trump of God. It is exclusively to raise the sleeping saints and change us who remain alive for His presence, when both are caught up together in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Not a word implies that the world hears at that moment, not a word that earth and heaven are shaken. Not only is there total silence as to these bold importations, but we are expressly taught by the same apostle that, “when He shall be

manifested, then shall ye also be manifested with Him in glory.” We must therefore have been caught up before the common manifestation of Him and His in the same glory. This violence is beneath a sober believer. It is absurd to say that the archangel's voice or the trumpet of God must be heard beyond the saints concerned. When the day comes for man to be raised for the resurrection of judgment, we are told of neither. The voice of their Judge will raise for their doom those that believed not but did evil. We may not add more without divine authority. We have seen how different it will be when the Son of man comes on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory to gather together His elect of Israel from the four winds. Here the rapture on high is not hinted. It is His presence for the earthly people, and therefore as expressly for all on earth to see (Rev. 1:7); as the other was to gather on high the heavenly ones. Only ignorance can set the one in opposition to the other; and ignorance is apt to be impatient, self-willed, and abusive against what it has not learned from God in scripture. But such a spirit condemns itself to considerate children of God.

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

It would be crass indeed for any to say that the epiphany or appearing of Christ is secret. The question is entirely whether the Spirit of God does not draw a plain and sure distinction between the presence of the Lord to gather His own, and the appearing of His presence to destroy the lawless one and his adherents. If His presence necessarily conveyed appearing, how could the apostle write as he did in the same context, 2 Thess. 2:1 and 8? If he meant us to learn the distinction, how could he have intimated it more exactly? It is well to leave it to the late Prof. Jowett and the incredulous school to teach that the apostle wrote loosely and reasoned ill.

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

What is particularly awful for that day is the intimation in verse 12 of our chapter, which connects with the lawless one. “Whose presence is according to the working of Satan in all power and signs and wonders of falsehood, and in all deceit of unrighteousness to those that perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. And for this reason God sendeth them a working (or, energy) of error, that they should believe the lie, that they all might be judged who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” Here we see that Satan will work in imitative counteraction of God's power that wrought in Christ. It is no trickery of priests or monks, no winking Madonnas, or liquefying blood, or profane fire ostensibly of the Holy Ghost. The same terms are here used of Satan's energy in the man of sin, as Peter employed in Acts 2:22 of the Lord Jesus as demonstrated by God to the Jews. On the other hand God will give up men by a judicial blindness to believe the lie of Satan that man, and especially this man of sin, is supreme God; so that he even dares to sit down in the sanctuary, showing that he is God. It will be divine retribution. They had rejected the truth, they had no love for it that they might be saved. They imputed the undeniable works of power and wonders and signs of the Lord Jesus to Beelzebub; they ascribe to the only God those of Satan by this minion of his, the man of sin. As the Jews were at last given up to blindness for their unbelief, so will Christendom be. Jews, professing Christians, &c., will combine to worship the son of perdition, as Jews and Gentiles united to crucify the Lord of glory. And the last will be worse than the first. “I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.”

But at this very time among the distant and till then heathen nations will be a great and true work of God's mercy, when godly Jews, forced to flee from the scene of the antichrist in Jerusalem sustained by the dragon-honored Roman Emperor, are used of God to win a countless throng of Gentiles by preaching the gospel of the kingdom; as we learn by comparing Matt. 24:14 with 25:31 to the end, also with Rev. 7:9, &c., and 14:6, 7. It is an “everlasting gospel.”

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

Of course many will tell us how dangerous it is to predict; and so it would be for them, us, or any uninspired men. But the study of prophecy is calculated and meant to keep us from predicting. Those who value and study the written word should be humble enough to praise God for the lamp of prophecy. If you despise the inspired prophecies, you may set up to be a prophet; and if you do so, who can wonder if you are a false one? God alone knows and can tell the future. But God has revealed it; and we have the responsibility of believing or of being infidel, A man cannot truly believe these things without their leaving a divine impress upon his soul. If you have Christ the hope in your heart, show it in your hand and on your forehead, seeking to stand true to Him whom you believe. The Lord Jesus is coming; but He is to appear also. He is not merely coming to receive His own, when the result will be in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor. 15:52). That the world should see the change and translation of the saints, as it is unknown to the scriptures, so it seems neither necessary nor fitting1.

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

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

But as already said, there is a bearing on service. Timothy was to keep the injunction, laid on him, spotless, irreproachable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 6:14). There is a pressure of responsibility; and responsibility in scripture attaches to His appearing, as sovereign grace does to His coming and receiving us to Himself for the Father's house. But it is the merest fallacy to conclude that our abiding on earth till then is implied in keeping it, any more for us than for Timothy. Neither departure to be with Christ nor being caught up to be with the Lord at His coming hinders like fidelity on our part or on his. But another principle is involved.

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

Let us refer to one scripture more and a solemn one, Rev. 17. Two evil objects of judgment are set before us; one called the great Harlot, the other the Beast. The first object is seen sitting upon many waters, “with whom the kings of the earth” &c. (verses 1-6). At first they are together: the corrupt woman, seated upon a well-known and remarkably characterized Beast; the Beast with seven heads and ten horns, the meaning of which symbols is not doubtful. Much may be gathered by comparing verse 1 here with verses 9, 10 of chap. 21. “And there came unto me” &c. Is it not plain from the comparison, that the one is the counterpart of the other? that Babylon, the harlot, is Satan's sad contrast to the bride, the Lamb's wife? As the one is the holy city having the glory of God, the bride of the Lamb, the other corrupts herself with the kings of the earth, to their corruption also. This explains why she is styled “Harlot.” She is the great ruling city of the world, which has her kingdom over the kings to their ruin. Not so the church glorified, the body of Christ, the Lamb s wife. “And the nations shall walk by her light; and the kings of the earth bring their glory unto her” (the heavenly city). The bride is said to be “the holy city, Jerusalem,” that comes down out of heaven from God. This, then, is the holy (not the great) city. If we read in the ordinary text “He showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem,” the word “great” ought, as is known, to be expunged, and the word “holy” transposed to take its place, “the holy city, Jerusalem.”

But still the very fact that the holy city, Jerusalem, is the church glorified, gives no little help for understanding Babylon. What is the religious body which under the shelter of Christ's name, pretends to be the mother of all the churches? Can anyone hesitate? Was there ever a system of such varied idolatry, hypocritical corruption, and atrocious cruelty in the Savior's name?

Granted, that much evil has been done by mischievous men actuated by strong feeling in so-called established churches, the national body of this country, the national body of Scotland, and that of any other land; but what is this in comparison with the pretensions of her that claims all countries and tongues, kings as well as subjects? Can there be a question who and what she is? Has there ever been any but this one, the great harlot that sits upon the many waters?

There can be no reasonable doubt about the meaning of Babylon; but, as if to preclude the possibility, we have several marks. First, she dominated once the Beast as none ever else did, arrayed in all the world's splendor, and earth's richest ornaments. Next, she abandoned herself up to illicit union with the kings of the earth for their gifts of power. Then, her golden cup was full of abominations, and “the unclean things of her fornications” beyond all rivalry. Lastly, she is a vindictive claimant,2 the most unrelenting of persecutors, drunk with the blood of the saints. Have you not heard of an ecclesiastical body which thinks it her duty, for the love of God and the good of men's souls, to exterminate heretics? She is herself as innocent as Pilate. She kills none; she only hands them over to the civil power to be punished! Alas! there never was a Pagan power, nor the worst of Jewish fanatics, nor the most frenzied of Mohammedan scourges, which so tortured the saints of God as Babylon has done. So clear is her identification that one needs not even to tell her very name. Surely the truth must be very evident when it is unnecessary to say who she is to the most unlettered, where the Bible is read.

Nor is this nearly all we are told here. The last verse says, “The woman is the great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth.” There is a distinction we may note here. The chapter does not confound the harlot and the woman. It is the woman that is declared to be the symbol of the ruling city. This is unquestionable, for there never was one that ruled as this city did. The better history is known, the more it will be felt that Rome only it can be. That one city ruled more and longer than any other since the world began; and everybody in the apostle's day would know where that city lay and what was its name.

It was not Athens; for Athens could never for any considerable time rule even Greece. It was not Jerusalem before, nor Constantinople since. Some think that this refers to a future Babylon in Chaldea; but such a city must be built on the plain of Shinar. How then could it be truly said to be built on seven hills? So many heaps of her ruins could hardly be an answer. The old Chaldean capital had been a. great city; it passed away, and only remains to occupy the curiosity of learned men. Here was one ruling over the kings of the earth. But one city could be said so to reign in the days of John, and no city ever has so reigned since. London, vaster than any and of world-wide influence, is in no sense reigning over the kings of the earth.

This city was to become the harlot, and so to exercise power over the Roman Beast or empire, the Beast of seven heads and of ten horns. But at first sight there is a difficulty here; for the Roman empire has disappeared. It existed and has fallen. How then are we to understand the chapter? The historian tells us that the Roman empire long ago declined and fell. There he stops; he could not lift the veil; and alas he

believed not in God's revelation. Not history explains prophecy, but prophecy explains history. Prophecy is the, true and divine key to the prospects of the world. Accordingly here is the explanation—the Beast that then was, the Roman Beast, would cease to exist. “The Beast that thou sawest was, and is not.” Its vast power was to perish; and the infidel historian chronicles the fact. But behold in the word another thing which history could not divine. If God's word is true and sure, the Roman Beast is to revive. It is well known that its revival has been essayed. Charlemagne tried; Napoleon the First tried; Napoleon the Third would have liked well to have tried. Not that one has sympathy with those who pretend to forecast the person. There were many that fixed on the last-named fallen potentate; and a few cling still to the notion of a relative. They are premature: better leave guess-work to such as do not search into prophecy.

Here is the word of God. Why should any predict? You had better not pretend to it; the word of God has spoken already; be content with His predictions. Now the word of God has said nothing of the sort; it speaks of the Beast that should ascend out of the bottomless pit (or, abyss), and go into perdition. Why add to this? Why speculate? Let us only believe. The restrainer will then be gone. Diabolical power will revive the Roman empire. And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the Beast that was, and is not, and—. The common reading “and yet is” () is incorrect. “And shall be present”) is the true reading and sense. Here, then, we have the clearest intimation that the Roman empire is to be reconstructed, under the most fatal influence for a little, before the age ends and the Lord returns in judgment.

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

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

Many have desired it; but the result of their policy, when action has been tried before the time, is that such prove abortive and perish. By and by it will be accomplished. Then the Beast will be reconstituted. There will be unity, one central authority, without extinguishing the separate kingdoms, save that the little horn acquires three. Thus there will be the revived Roman empire with distinct kingdoms. The future state will consist of the imperial headship, along with the subordinate kingdoms of the once united western empire. The balance of power will then be required no longer in the West. But in the East and North there will be mighty adversaries whom some so ignore that they confound as if they all were the same, though one will besiege, and the other be besieged. Between them all the day is coming when Satan will deceive the world. God will accomplish His own purpose of gathering out His saints to Himself. Then the world is allowed to have its little moment, when Satan has consummated his power on earth. (See Rev. 17:12, 13.)

The state here described is perfectly unexampled before or since the fall of the Roman empire. One knows the independence of even the least of the kingdoms. They do not like others to interfere, if they be ever so little. Several too join—some for, and some against. Such is the way things have long gone on in the political field of the West.

Here the principle of national independence will have disappeared. Separate or party action is all gone. The time is come for a vast change in the world. This will be the character of it: a great imperial power, called the Beast; not absorbing all, but wielding the separate powers of the west. The Beast is a type of strength, no doubt, but absolutely destitute of reference to God. So it has been really throughout; but then boldly and avowedly rejecting God at the close. The western imperial system will have thrown off all care for God or thought of Him, yea it will defy Him. Apostasy will have prepared the way. This imperial power will have the direction of the properly Roman dominion, the western nationalities of Europe.3 The separate kings will be flattered with the idea that they have each a separate existence and will. But they are only as the sinews of the strong man who sways them all. What follows their destruction of Babylon? “These shall make war with the Lamb.”

What a difference from the blessed reign of peace and righteousness, no less than from what men dream as the gradually optimist future! On the other hand, the saints come from heaven, being with the Lamb when the conflict arrives. (Compare Rev. 19:14.) Being changed, they are forever with the Lord, and follow Him out of heaven. So, when the final contest arises between the Lord Jesus and Satan represented by the leader of the West, the Lord is accompanied by His saints. They are here styled “called, and faithful, and chosen.” Some have thought they must be angels; but this they are not. For angels are never called “faithful.” And, again, they are said to be not merely chosen but “called.” How could an angel be “called”? Calling is an appeal of grace, which comes to one who has gone astray in order to bring him back to God. But this is never true of an angel. The gospel is God's calling fallen and guilty man to give him, through faith and because of redemption, a place with Christ in heaven. Those who believe on Him are here shown to be with Him; and they are “called, and faithful, and chosen.” They have been there from Rev. 4 or rather just before, as the chapter implies.

But there is more. What becomes of the woman? We hear about her too in verse 15, where we discern her vast quasi-spiritual influence. It is not a national body (inconsistent with the true nature of the church as this must be), but an idolatrous, persecuting, pretentiously religious system, claiming to be the spouse of Christ, but really an unclean harlot that extends her corruption over all the world. For if Rome be her center, she sits upon the many waters, peoples, and crowds and nations and tongues. How easily seen who and what she is, and what only such a system can he! There is but one such in Christendom, though she has daughters too.

Further notice (as in verse 16), what a change takes place!4 Instead of these horns, or kings of the West, being any longer subjected to Babylon, they turn furiously with the Beast against her. Would it not be an incredibly strange thing for the Pope to turn against his own church or city? Hence the Pope is not the Beast, and has nothing directly to do with Babylon's destruction. It is the symbol of the empire in its last phase, when the Beast from the abyss is thus joined by the various leaders of the different kingdoms of the West against that proud and most guilty system.

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

There are solemn premonitory signs even now. Let me mention only one fact noticed by both Romanists and Protestants. You are all aware of Ecumenical Councils lately held in Rome. One distinctive character is remarkable, as emphatically indicative of the change that has taken place even among the Western powers. For the first time the Pope could not ask one Catholic sovereign to sit in the council. It was composed simply and exclusively of priests. Not a single ambassador or representative of the crowned heads was there. There never was such a state of things before in medieval or modern Europe. Originally indeed, at Nice, it was not the Pope who convened or took the lead but the Emperor, who at least kept the turbulent bishops in a measure of order.

Granted, that infidelity underlies the change. It is overflowing even now everywhere, as by and by the Beast will be steeped up to the eyes in blasphemy. He and the horns will be given over to the hatred of God, while at the same time they will at last hate the Harlot which had deceived them so long. It is a violent reaction against the vileness of Babylon, but no less a rejection of divine truth. You see its spirit in our own country and day. Leading men glory without shame in spoiling the religious dignitaries and their earthly goods. This is going on in all lands; but the end of it will have a deeper dye. Do men call it “the Eternal City"? Alas! the Romish priests keep it hidden from their hearts that Babylon, the great city of the west, is doomed to be thrown down and found no more at all, but her smoke to rise up unto the ages of the ages, everlasting like Sodom and Gomorrah, when the Lord reigns over the earth, and the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.

It is not of course meant that we are yet come to the Beast and the ten horns of Rev. 17. But enough has been said to show the rapid trend of the present times—the strong way in which the wind blows in the West. Men prepare to turn violently against what they had been so long enslaved to. As the end approaches, the word of God asserts its majesty and power to men of faith, as fresh as at the beginning, but by the mass is more and more slighted and scorned. We are verging toward the close of the profession of Christianity on the earth, when the Lord again leads His own to go forth and meet the Bridegroom. Besides, we have these admonitory symptoms that the world gets weary of hollow earthly religion, and becomes ashamed of forms which are themselves no better than empty superstitions. And no wonder, for there is not an outward ordinance remaining, scarcely even a form, which has not been utterly perverted, as well as the truth itself to a great extent ignored or denied.

A Christian must be beyond measure prejudiced by his earthly system and too excited against the fuller and heavenly truth, who could dream of saying, “Coming to take vengeance is the primary object of His leaving heaven.” Had he annexed and limited vengeance to “the day of the Lord,” he might perhaps be justified; but it is so flagrantly opposed both to 1 Thess. 4:16, 17, and to 2 Thess. 2:1, that God's word condemns the unspiritual deliverance beyond appeal, and proves the importance of distinguishing between “that day” and “the presence of the Lord” which has for its primary object the gathering of His saints to Himself above. Not a hint is breathed in 1 Cor. 15:56, more than in those Epistles of vengeance or judgment in awry form or degree. The one speaks of “a mystery"; because to raising the dead saints, which is no mystery but an O. T. truth, the apostle adds the new revelation that “we” (Christians) “shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in an eye's twinkling, at the last trumpet; for it shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” The other says, as an equally new revelation, that after the dead saints rise, we the living that remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall be always with the Lord. They are the divine expression of grace, and of nothing but grace.

Shortsighted brethren (and they are many, if this be a comfort to them) confound this heavenly gathering together with the wholly different gathering together of the “elect” of Israel, as in Matt. 24 where not a word implies any catching up to join the Lord. They are scattered to all quarters and need to be gathered, when the time comes for the Son of man's presence for the earth. They are expressly called His “elect” in Isa. 65:9, 15, 22, as in Matt. 24:31. As in the same verse “a great sound of trumpet” summons the elect of Israel, so in that day (Isa. 27:12, 13) a great trumpet shall be blown summoning them to worship Jehovah in the holy mount at Jerusalem. This the Lord clears and confirms in Matt. 24. The context alone can decide whether the elect be of Israel, of the church, or of Gentiles; for it is true of all three as the different parts of the Lord's prophecy on Olivet prove. But blessed as they are to be on earth, it is quite distinct from those caught up to meet Him for heavenly glory. From these all thought of vengeance is excluded. Israel's deliverance is accompanied by the destruction of their enemies. Our rapture to the Lord is entirely and exclusively a question of sovereign grace in its consummation for heaven and in being thus ever with Him, our best and brightest privilege. But even His presence for the earth, though necessarily involving vengeance on the wicked, has for its “primary object” the deliverance of the sorely tried and scattered or beleaguered Jews, and the gathering of His elect of Israel.

The want of eye-salve is not duly felt. They are rich and increased with goods, especially the old clothes of Judaism and the new suit of philosophy; and they have need of nothing. Hence, by not distinguishing things that evidently and profoundly differ, the whole truth on this subject is embroiled and thrown into confusion. For the kingdom of God embraces earthly as well as heavenly things. How sad to misuse the less to darken or deny the greater! There is to be the Father's kingdom where the righteous are to shine as the sun; there is to be the Son of man's kingdom where His earthly people shall be blessed and honored as never before; but in order to this last the sword of divine judgment must clear the way for the Lord's righteous scepter. No such earthly dealing applies to the heavens, or on our behalf before going on high. There the Lord went up triumphantly and in peace; there and thus at His call shall the heavenly saints be caught up. How can saints overlook the contrast or fight against it!

The “desperate shifts” are exclusively with those who are blind enough to swamp grace and judgment, heaven and earth, heavenly family and earthly people, in one strange conglomeration.

Assuredly scripture gives no countenance to such disorder. It is ignorance or calumny to say that any one sought to discredit the champion of this Babylonish system. God allowed that he should also fall info the wildest delusion, to say nothing now of the gravest error as to Christ which he himself acknowledged and in part recanted, many of his chief associates more fully than was charged on any of them. But, apart from this, what does an excuser mean by such a cry? Is he not aware that the one he thus goes out of his way to defend taught openly and definitely, that the church is to be omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent in the day of glory? See “Thoughts on the Apocalypse,” pp. 45-51 (1843). Is this, or is it not, heterodox and even, blasphemous? Was it ever retracted? Surely it is “a crooked device” to ignore such extravagant and fatuous falsehood, and to impute deceit, wanton cruelty, and unscrupulous misrepresentation to brethren who had to clear the Lord's name from being a cover for this and many other serious errors.

Beware, brother, of a zeal not according to knowledge! Have you not too good reason to pause and consider yourself, when you compare the heavenly side of Christ's future presence to “a new god newly come up”? On the face of things we go up, not to the “old paths” of O.T. prophecy, but to the apostolic and prophetic revelations of the N. T., where alone specifically Christian truth is brought fully out. Meet, if you can, the clear indications of Christ's presence in these distinct aspects, as we gather from a full induction and a careful study of God's word. We do not expect help from Christendom as it was and is. It is not we that forget the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to lead into all the truth; still less take refuge in such dumb or blind guides, as the post-apostolic fathers, who were either altogether silent on the great and distinctive privileges of the Christian and the church, or fell into exclusively Jewish hopes with grotesque exaggeration, in denial of all the prophets' testimony to the restoration of Israel, the center of all the nations in their due place of blessing. Everything brought in since the apostles is a novelty which we repudiate, far more decidedly than such as proclaim themselves our adversaries and manifest a spirit both unreasonable and implacable. Why should our pointing to the heavenly truth they ignore sting them to such childish wrath?

Again, let us consider the testimony which 2 Thess. 1 renders. It is certain that here is the execution and display of the Lord's retributive judgment. The aim was to make known the general character of the day, before taking up and refuting the false teaching that the day of the Lord was arrived, as in chap. ii. 2. The apostle boasts in them, as he says, in the churches of God for their endurance and faith in all their persecutions and tribulations they were sustaining. This he calls a manifest token of God's righteous judgment to the end of their being counted worthy of His kingdom, for the sake of which they also suffer; “if at least it is a righteous thing with God to award tribulation to those that trouble you, and to you that are troubled rest with us [who were no less fellow-sufferers], at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven.” This implies, of course, His presence; but it says more; it will be His unveiling, after being hidden from view, His heavenly saints being already with Him. For His revelation is described as with angels of His power, in flaming fire taking vengeance on two classes, those that know not God, and those that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus [Christ]; “who are such as shall pay as penalty everlasting destruction from the Lord's face and from the glory of His might, when He shall have come [not to receive His own to Himself, but] to be glorified in His saints and wondered at in all that believed (for our testimony unto you was believed) in that day.”

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

It is not said, we may just observe, “in all them that believe “: this is a vulgar error. No doubt a great harvest of blessing would begin on earth, not for Israel only but for all the nations. Here it is all the saints who come with the Lord in that day. The lost had no excuse. There had been full testimony; and the Thessalonians by grace had profited and would share in that display of glory. Part in that hope to which we are called, and in that faith of the unseen which accompanies it, was closed; though there would be exceptional favor to the Apocalyptic saints who are to suffer death for Jesus subsequently. Henceforward it would be for the world to “know” that the Father sent the Son and loved those heavenly ones as He loved Christ (John 17:23). For the world would see Christ and His own in the same displayed glory. 2 Thess. 2:3-12 gives us the awful introduction which brings on that day; for this was the subject, not the Lord's coming which was a motive to cheer, but His day.

This display of judgment coalesces with the narrower application to Israel given in Matt. 24 It is about the same time. No one cavils at its being “seen” as the lightning, or would weaken its plainly expressed meaning. And 1 Thess. 5 pronounces it “sudden destruction.” It will be both “sudden” and “seen.” But it wholly differs from 1 Cor. 15:51, 52, 1 Thess. 4:16, 17, and Jude 24, where indisputably we are given the previous dealing of the Lord's grace, that when He will thus come in public judgment of His living enemies, the heavenly saints might accompany Him in manifest rest and glory before all eyes. No one is entitled to imagine lightning or flaming fire when the Bridegroom comes for His bride. Any such judicial terms or thoughts are then and there entirely absent. Those who foist them in are without the smallest justification. To everything there is a season; a time to love, and a time to hate. Invincible disproof appears elsewhere; but this we need not anticipate. It is enough here to say that there is no evidence for any such incongruous mixture. It is the unfounded assumption, not to say the gross interpolation, of an unsound hypothesis, the essence of which is an effort to exclude the first heavenly joy, and reduce all to the earthly expectation of the godly Jewish remnant of the future, which will be gratified in “that day,” when the sons of God are revealed, yea the Firstborn among many brethren, to the deliverance of the whole creation groaning and travailing together in pain till then (Rom. 8:19, 21).

“The revolt” goes farther and deeper than thought the Reformers and their followers since, who were limited by the pressure of the enormities of Romanism. The apostle discloses a still more guilty and rebellious reality still future. The apostasy means, on the part of Christendom, Protestants as really as Papists, the coming abandonment of all revealed truth. It far exceeds the departure of “some” “from the faith,” as we read in the earlier verses of 1 Tim. 4 This was realized first in Gnostic folly, and yet more in the determined, durable, and systematic departure of Romanism. 2 Tim. 3:1-9 (though, like the former express saying of the Spirit, having its application then when written, it bore yet more distinctly on the independent and heady self-assertion of Protestants) was still far short of the apostasy, when all form of godliness will be discarded with scorn.

But the man of sin revealed, the son of perdition, issues from the apostasy, and is its crown of shame. All of old admitted that he is the antichrist of John, though most confound him with the first Beast of the Revelation, the head of the civil power in defiance of God at that day; whereas he is clearly the quasi-religious but really most irreligious chief that rivals Christ's position, no longer as Priest (which is exactly the Pope's atrocious pride), but as Prophet and King. He has accordingly not seven horns and seven eyes (the seven Spirits of God), nor even three, but “two horns like a lamb.” Nor need we wonder at the common confusion; for these two Beasts equally cast off God and slay His saints, and are as closely allied as their great enemies, the final Assyrian or king of the north, and Gog, Prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, who sustains his ally, foes to the emperor of the west, and the willful king that is to reign in the land. It is not surprising that when grace wrought to deliver nations and countries from the wickedness and domineering of the Popes, those who took part in that great movement and suffered not a little should have it to be the predicted lawless one; for Popery was then the worst evil in Christendom, the most offensive to God in all the earth, as any can see if he weigh the denunciation of the great harlot in Rev. 17, 18.

Still even there it is apparent, that this corrupt, cruel, and idolatrous system is expressly “a mystery,” the loathsome counterpart of Christ's bride, and quite distinct from, though long associated with, the Beast or imperial power and its vassals, who at last turn against her in hatred, strip, devour, and burn her It will be no longer the mystery of lawlessness then, of which she when she sits a queen is so great a part. The man of sin will next be revealed, and the Beast and the willing kings, of whom the False Prophet is the director in that day. Here it is that the Protestant commentators, like the Fathers, fall so short of the written word as to the future. One has the fullest sympathy with their conscience awakened to judge and quit the iniquities, pretensions, and horrors of Popery. But they were notoriously ill versed either in the church's heavenly character, in the Christian hope as well as worship, and in the prophetic word, yet worthy of exceeding love for their work, their faith, and their sufferings.

Some of the Popes were monsters of impurity, deceit, and cruelty; others of egregious worldly-mindedness, and political ambition, and of outrageous vanity and pride. Others were reputable persons, and some few of piety when days were dark and evil. It is therefore untrue that they could be all fairly called “the man of sin, the son of perdition.” Scripture never speaks in terms of exaggeration. Nor does such a moral description, any more than the ominous repetition of the traitor's doom, suit a succession. They point to a person surpassing all others since the world began, in the crisis of the present evil age, reserved for condign punishment at our Lord's appearing. An office as a king or priest, admits of a succession; but here it is a person emphatically distinct and alone.

This is confirmed by the words of verse 4, “That opposeth and exalteth himself against (or, above) all that is called God or object of veneration, so that he should himself sit down in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” The lawless one is to be a sinner beyond sinners, the man of sin, and affecting to be God, claiming the honor of the Supreme on earth, in His temple, not in mere earthly things, or personal vain glory, like Herod in Acts 12. The Christ who was God became on earth a bondman to glorify His God and Father at all cost. It is a mere imposture for the Pope to dub himself vicar of Christ, and head of the church on earth, while acknowledging formally the Lord in heaven. But for this reason he does not fulfill the arrogant self-exaltation of this adversary, who raises himself above all that is called God or object of religious veneration. And the temple of God literally, in Jerusalem before the age ends, will fall in with his blasphemous claim; for many of the Jews will be back there in unbelief, whilst a godly remnant hold aloof and flee as the Lord directed. It is not well to pare down scripture to pile the agony against the Pope; and it is a danger for men who are not papists to exclude the extreme pit of destruction as only for others to their own peril.

Hence it appears that though the apostasy is the starting point, the man of sin revealed is a great advance of an audacious and unbounded impiety under Satan's power, to which the total abandonment of the Christian revelation leaves the door open. Grace scorned and Christ the gift of God for sinful men utterly derided, the man of sin follows; man not only without God, but ignoring and spurning all divine restraint; atheistic lawlessness denying sin and wallowing in it without shame or fear. As God was Himself in Christ, the image of Him who abides invisible, the man of sin will be His personal adversary, exalting himself above all that is called God or object of veneration. “Who is the liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22). Though beginning as a false Christ, at last He will flout the hope of Israel, no less than the Christian testimony. As the culmination of the extreme pitch of defiance, in claiming to be God supreme, he seats himself in the temple of God. Thus apostate Judaism amalgamates in that hour with Christian apostasy; and the first temptation for man to become as God ends in the lie of man ousting God and showing forth himself to be God in His very temple.

As for the alleged difficulty raised on the sitting of the man of sin in the temple of God on Mount Moriah at the end of the age, it is essential to bear in mind that the apostle here incorporates the testimonies of two prophets who treat of Jewish iniquity at that very time. The first of these, Dan. 11:36-39, is explicit of the place. It is no other than the land of Juda. The second, Isa. 11:4, is equally clear that he is the “lawless one” destined to his awful doom at the breath of the lips of Jehovah Jesus. Into neither scripture can one foist Christendom. Haggai also enables us to see that, whatever be the iniquity, destruction, or renewal, the house of Jehovah has its unity to the ear of faith. “Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes as nothing? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith Jehovah; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high-priest I will fill this house with glory, saith Jehovah of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith Jehovah of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith Jehovah of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith Jehovah of hosts” (2:3-9). Neither the hostile Antiochus IV. nor the evil patronage of the Idumean Herod, nor the blasphemous self-deification of the antichrist, destroys God's title and rights. It is His house throughout, whatever the faithlessness of His people, and the seeming triumph of Satan meanwhile; and the end will be glorious and permanent, and forever.

The apostle predicts a time when the church will have been gathered on high, the Jew and the once professing church becoming alike apostate, and the man of sin revealed, the awful contrast of His revelation, who, though true God, became the most humbled bondman for our redemption to the glory of God. Thus there is no real difficulty in the lawless one seating himself in the Jewish temple to show off as God. This is very different from the pretended successor of Peter, the spurious Vicar of Christ, and hypocritical servant of God's servants; nor is there the least ground in God's word to call St. Peter's at Rome, the house of God, or to allow that the Pope so sits in Christendom as a whole, seeing that half or more utterly reject his assumption. Again, while succession is quite allowable in the office of a king or a priest, it is quite excluded from the description of a personage so unique as “the man of sin,” “the son of perdition,” the lawless one here portrayed, no less than his awful end. But is it not plain on the face of our chapter that the lawless one opposes and exalts himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped? This the most aspiring of the Popes never did on any fair interpretation of their words and deeds, however dissolute and flagitious in life, however arrogant and ambitious in sacerdotal or secular power. Many and various antichrists there have been; but they all point to one individual at the end, who as here written will surpass every person that preceded in impious and audacious setting up to be

God in His own house, Jew and Gentiles uniting to worship him as they did of old to crucify the true King of Israel, yea the true God incarnate.

But from apostolic days the germs were sown and actually there, which were to bear these fatal fruits when the divine restraint (6, 7) should be removed, and the season come for their full display. The departure in the churches of Galatia from the sovereign grace of God that saves sinners was an early stage in declension. So was at a later day Satan's effort at Colosse to interpolate philosophy, the principle of Gentiles, and religious ordinance, the principle of Judaism, between Christ the head and the members of His body; for both principles struck a death-blow at Christ's union with the church. Other evils already noticed in the two Epistles to Timothy contributed their quota; and so did that slipping back or away, of which Heb. 6 and x. treat; which, if yielded to, could only end in apostasy and irremediable ruin. How could it be otherwise, if those, who had in any measure enjoyed the effects of the Holy Spirit's presence, or who had owned Christ's sacrifice and eternal redemption, renounced that only salvation of God's grace and power? All this was but the mystery of “lawlessness” at work, which when the apostles were gone rushed on to greater ungodliness, with tradition, human and angelic mediators, Mariolatry, transubstantiation, earthly priesthood, the mass, the confessional, relics, Papal assumption, and all the other, heterodoxies and horrors of Rome.

Yet will the end be still worse, not corruption but rebellion against God bold and open, as our chapter intimates. For the Popes confess their sins to a priest, and worship God, Christ, with the Virgin, &c. The Popes enjoin worship divine, and human in varying degrees, to save appearances. How can fairminded men say (in the face of such worship of God, wretched as it is, with abundant idolatry) that they oppose and exalt themselves above all that is called God or object of veneration? How contend or conceive that this rather polytheistic character of Popery agrees with setting up self in the temple of God, showing forth one's self as God?

One could not expect the men who took the Protestant view to know that the Restrainer will be out of the way only when the saints are translated, in whom Be dwells individually and collectively; and then the temple of God will be no longer on earth in a spiritual sense. Nay, some little after that, He ceases to act in ordaining the powers that be. Satan's brief season will then come, and the season proper to the revelation of the lawless one, the man of sin. Dan. 11:36-39 is plain and positive proof that his field of operation is “the glorious land “; and it is no less plain that the apostle applies that prophecy to the personage he here describes for his blasphemous self-exaltation and self-deification above every object of reverence or worship, real or false. It is also equally plain that he applies Isa. 11:4 to the Lord's slaying him with the breath of His mouth, the true reading of ver. 4. This again confirms the locality of this wicked person. It has nothing whatever to do with the church or professing Christendom; for all that will either be gone, or have sunk into the apostasy and the blasphemous worship of man as God. All these texts explain why the daring apotheosis will be in the temple of God in Jerusalem. There the blessed Spirit came down and filled all the confessors of the Lord Jesus. At this time He will be clean gone; and Satan will have filled his minion, the antichrist, worshipped as God in the temple by Jews and Gentiles banded against the true God. But the Reformers and their descendants have been slow to believe the prophets, being absorbed in the urgent questions of Popery, and hence indisposed to allow the uprise of an evil even more appalling than that which was the worst then extant.. Who can wonder at this? But the revival of the true hope has given a great impulse to the prophetic word also, so that the truth of the future has shone out brightly in precision and full extent according to scripture.

But one error leads to many more, as for instance to the unsound interpretation that prevailed and still does among Protestants that “consuming with the spirit of His mouth” means the gradual and gracious work of the gospel; whereas it is solely the Lord's immediate and destructive action at His appearing, as the last clause of Isa. 30:3 may convince the most stubborn, if there be subjection to scripture. The gospel is certainly not like a stream of brimstone, which destroys judicially.

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

That the church has the chief place as an instrument of that restraint, they might readily conceive who had just experienced God's power in gathering to Christ's name in truth, peace, and love, Jews and Gentiles that believed on Jesus, notorious for implacable hostility, especially in the religious domain. How could there be that renunciation of this grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ as long as He was here? Is not God's house on earth, a living God's assembly, pillar and basement of the truth? As long as such a witness of the mystery of godliness bore up, Satan could not force his scheme to efface or trample down the truth, and set up undisputed his lie.

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

There is an element in the restraint far more direct and influential as well of nearer interest, which seem to have escaped the tradition-mongers old and new. For the Spirit of God has in the church a most special and congenial sphere of loving care and continual action personally in connection with the Father and the Son. To it He has imparted unity, constituting believers, Jew or Greek, the one body of Christ; as also by His indwelling He makes it God's house or habitation. No factor in the barrier against the antichrist is so decided as this, which has been ordinarily left out of the account, because the real and exceptional character of the church was so quickly lost by all of old, and is in general so little apprehended still. He is here acting in power according to Christ's victory over Satan, not only in life, but in redemption. Who but the Spirit could adequately restrain Satan? He made use externally of an earthly government and yet more the church; yet who but He working on earth could be the real restrainer? Of course the Holy Spirit has no such close or intimate relation to any world-power. Yet when the Roman governor talked of his having authority to crucify as well as to release, the Lord told him what to the Gentile that knew not God

must have sounded strange, but is the truth, Thou hadst no authority against Me except it were given thee from above. The powers that be are ordained by God, and the Spirit is the agent in their unsuspected control also; so that, however godless the nations or their rulers may be, the issue is by His determinate counsel and foreknowledge; and the Jews and their rulers, because in unbelief they knew not their own Messiah, fulfilled also the voices of the prophets, read every sabbath, by condemning Him.

His presence in the church then, as long as it is here, is much the weightiest part in that restraint; and thus Satan cannot go beyond “the mystery of lawlessness,” while the great mystery as respects Christ and as respects the church is being carried on. Hence the man of sin cannot be revealed till his own season shall have come: the restrainer forbids it. When that heavenly work is completed on earth, and the last member of Christ's body in his place, the Lord will come and receive to Himself not only them but all that were His from the very first. Though the rapture will close that peculiar association here, the Holy Ghost will still act for a time as He did before Pentecost, as it appears, spiritually and governmentally. Both Jews and Gentiles, not then joined in one body as now, will be brought to a saving knowledge of the truth, as is plainly taught, where above all we might expect it, in the Revelation; which also discloses the later epoch, when for the first time in the history of man not God but Satan ordains the Roman empire in its last and fatal form, and empowers the False Prophet, who shall reign as king in the holy land (Dan. 11:36-39, doing his own will, as Christ ever and only His Father's will.

These are the proofs and marks that the Restrainer will be then and there clean gone ( ).

Almost all versions unwittingly add to the word here. For it is not said “taken,” as might well be of an earthly power, or person, that does not vacate but is forcibly removed (). Not so the true Restrainer, behind all the visible and varying forms of the restraint; He goes of Himself, and quits the scene, judicially left open for a while to Satan's abominable pride and mischief. It means “till he become out of the way,” which as I believe precisely suits the Holy Spirit. But it suits no other person so well; still less that traditional impediment, of which some are confident still, though evidently long falsified by the event. Yet the Fathers, who furnished that tradition, looked for the personal antichrist, whom the Lord Jesus personally is to destroy. And so Dean Alford and Bp. Ellicott, &c., concede in deference to the terms of plain and positive scripture.

Observe another plain disproof of the application to Popery in vers. 9, 10, however earnestly able and pious men have argued to that effect. The true force points to an evil not yet accomplished and far more tremendous in the personal antichrist. “Whose presence (or, coming) is according to the energy of Satan in every power and signs and wonders of falsehood, and in every deceit of unrighteousness to those that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” For it is a very mistaken enfeebling of that awful fact then allowed to Satan in an exceptional way, that they are the mere juggling tricks of a deceitful priesthood, or “lying wonders” as in the A. & R. Vv.

As the Lord will manifest His presence in overwhelming power and glory, so will the presence of the lawless one be according to Satan's energy in every form of power and signs and wonders of falsehood to deceive and destroy. The same incredulity which refused the evidence of God's power and truth in Christ will fall under Satan's lie in these powers and prodigies. They are superhuman. Wonders were wrought to a certain point by Pharaoh's magicians; as in another way we see surprising effects by natural agents in Job's trials. But here similar language is employed about the man of sin, as the apostle Peter used about the Righteous One (Acts 2:22). They were real miracles to promote falsehood, not pretended ones; and the issue will be, not only his own perdition, but the deceiving of all his abettors to ruin everlasting, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. His lie, the deceit of unrighteousness, was incompatible with salvation by Christ and the truth. They all perish without doubt: is it so with every Papist? I dare not so say.

Now no Pope ever wrought a miracle, nor even, for aught one knows, pretended to it. What strange exaggeration then to ascribe this awful power of Satan to the Pope! What equally strange prejudice to deny it to the man of sin, whom the Lord at His appearing is to annul! The apostle gives the moral reason for a judgment so stern. “And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error that they should believe the falsehood, that all might be judged that believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (ver. 12). God's sending a working of error is judicial hardening at that crisis; and Satan follows with his deceiving marvels of power to drag down all its votaries to perdition. It is divine retribution at the last. They renounced the truth and salvation with it; they loved the lie, and must perish. But the heights and depths of Satan far transcend Popery and belong only to the consummation of the age. The elect of that day solely escape by divine grace, as this is at bottom true of all the elect in any day. How strikingly portrayed in contrast with the perdition of that awful time are the position and privileges of the Thessalonian saints, as the apostle depicts! “So then, brethren, stand, and hold fast the traditions ye were taught whether by word or by our letter.” As all scripture was not yet written, they were called to heed what they had been orally taught as well as by the apostolic letter. They were beloved by the Lord, chosen of God unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and faith of the truth, whereto He called them “by our gospel” to obtaining our Lord Jesus Christ's glory. “Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father that loved us and gave everlasting comfort and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and stablish [them] in every good work and word” (vers. 13-17). The judicial hardening, the energetic action of the enemy, and the day of the Lord were to fall exclusively on those who despised Christ and renounced the gospel; everlasting comfort and good hope through grace, were the portion of those who believed; and present establishing in every good work and word were besought on their behalf.

It may interest and profit some if we here notice a scripture, which is adduced more frequently perhaps than any other to oppose the rapture, at least before the day of manifestation. We refer to the parable of the wheat field, and the Lord's explanation, in Matt. 13. We refer to the only similitude in the chapter that is historical (, “likened,” not merely “is like"). The bondmen of Him that sowed the good seed proposed to root up the darnel of the enemy's sowing. But no: their work is that of grace. “The field is the world,” let commentators say what they may. It is not the church, where discipline is essential; but the kingdom where they must be left for judgment at the end, when it is no longer in patience but comes in power. “Suffer both to grow together unto the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers (or harvesters), Gather first the darnel, and bind it in bundles to burn it; but the wheat bring together into my granary.” The crop was spoiled; and no effective remedy can be, till the end of the age arrives, and its judgment.

The harvesters, unlike the bondmen, are angels. It will be for these, not for those, to bind in bundles the sons of the evil one, at the fit moment for their activity, and as their first revealed act; for the time of harvest is not an epoch, but a period. The angels are instruments of

divine providence; and at that season they will be employed in a measure, even before the sons of the kingdom are translated to the granary above. The wicked in the field will, by this instrumentality or means, be brought into close association, with a view to burning them ( ). It is not yet the penal execution that awaits them, but the preparatory act of God's providence which disposes them suitably for their doom. Nobody, one hopes, can be so ignorant as to conceive such a work by visible angels before Christ takes to Himself the saints on high. Probably most persons have no definite judgment about it.

Not indeed that anything transpiring at present is the accomplishment of this act: it will devolve by-and-by on His angels. But it is a grave thing to recognize in the actual combinations of our day; rife all over the world as never in the past, how the, coming event casts its shadow before. For men, without the fear of God confederate by all sorts of unions, to overawe or embarrass, and thus effect their selfish ends. The Lord will employ His angels (for the saints are still on earth), evidently before He appears to do this work perfectly with a view to His further aims. At present real Christians are mixed up in these fleshly and worldly combinations. But when the harvest season begins, it will not be so. The bundles will be made up exclusively of the guilty objects for His judgment. None but the wicked will be collected and bound for the purpose: this the angels can effect, as man could not, and saints are forbidden. It might be providentially at any unknown moment.

The wheat, the sons of the kingdom, are not left like the darnel on the field, but next brought together into Christ's granary. This, we all surely agree, means and must be to meet the Lord, who deigns to descend into the air; when at His call all the saints, dead and alive, are changed in a moment, and caught up to join Him, “and so shall we always be with the Lord.”

The Lord's explanation as usual adds to the original parable. Here the very momentous information is given of what will be manifest to all eyes. In the providential action the bundles were not said to be removed from the field; according to the figure they were left there to await their awful end. But later on during harvest “the Son of man shall send His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all offenses and those that do lawlessness, and they shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.” The other side of glory is equally clear: “then (not before) shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He that hath ears to hear let him hear.” It is not the rapture to heaven but the revelation from it. This may wound many a prejudice; but the truth is well worth it. It is the display of His presence, the appearing of His coming, His day, when the saints are beheld with Him in the heavenly glory. Christ and they are manifested together: they already with Him, not He alone before them, nor yet coming for them.

Thus, as it quite appears, on a closer study than is usually given to this most instructive parable and the Master's explanation, everything here is consistent with that later word which the apostle divulged in the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). As both are parts of the truth of God, they harmonize perfectly; while each contributes its own portion suitably to the divine purpose on the appropriate occasion. No doubt it is the future that we await in a perfect peace that rests on the blood of His cross; and in a fullness of joy created by His love which is as rich in grace and glory, as it is altogether beyond the mere creature, and as sure as God's word can make its revelation.

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

Here commentators are either silent or no less mistaken than as to the darnel. It is the kingdom again, not the church. Who can fail to see that they are plainly distinct? The kingdom was a familiar truth, though it took the form of “mystery” now. The church is first announced in Matt. 16:18, 19. The confusion of the two is not only a doctrinal blunder in theologians generally, but it has wrought great practical havoc in all ages to this day. Thus in the church we are bound to judge evil (1 Cor. 5); in the kingdom we are forbidden (as in ver. 30 of this chapter). Punishment is a work for angels' hands; not for Christians, who are called not to resist evil but to suffer, giving God thanks. Donatists and Catholics were utterly astray, understanding neither what they said, nor whereof they confidently affirmed. The truth of both kingdom and church was lost since apostolic days, as all may see who have light from God on these things. How far is it recovered to-day?

But here again we find that “in the end of the age the angels shall go forth and sever the wicked out of the midst of the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.” As there was a providential gathering of the darnel before the execution of the judgment, so there was a spiritual work by saintly men in sorting the good into vessels, before the execution of the judgment to clear the wicked out of their midst. There is the great common principle that this judgment belongs to the angels, not to the saints; but there is a marked difference in that the gathering of the wheat was immediate into the heavenly garner, but the darnel were subjected to a longer process, with the same sad end as the worthless fish. Only it is the inverse now; for these wicked ones are severed from among the righteous there, as the worthless were taken out for the terrible judgment of everlasting fire. In vain can one search for consistency of interpretation as to either of these parables in the moderns any more than in the ancients. Even the best vacillate strangely, partly through lack of duly distinguishing the kingdom and the church, partly through no less lack of discernment between the coming of the Lord for the saints, and His day with its terrors and destruction, when His own shall be manifested together with Him in glory.

But it is plain that not a word implies any visible act in the binding of the darnel into bundles first, and then of the sons of the kingdom, the wheat, gathered at once into the garner. No doubt the Lord comes down into the air and the changed saints are caught up to meet Him there. The garner is not on earth or in the air but in heaven. Thence in due time, the saints follow Him out of heaven (as Rev. 17:14; 19:14, distinctly teach) for the day of the Lord and His judgment of the Beast and the False Prophet, the kings of the earth, the darnels too, and every other object of divine retribution, the judgment of the quick or living. This quite falls in with the added explanation of both parables: on one side the display of the glorified saints, shining like the sun in the kingdom of their Father; and, on the other, of the Son of man through His angels clearing out of His kingdom all offenses, and those that work lawlessness, into the furnace of fire.

The day of the Lord is the open introduction of the age to come by terrific judgments, and never in scripture mixed up with His coming to receive His saints to Himself for the Father's house. And hence we saw, that the apostle appealed to His presence to gather the saints to Himself, as their bright hope, against the false and foolish notion, introduced by fraud, and calculated to agitate and alarm, that the day of the Lord had actually arrived. Its imminence was not the error; for it is an indisputable truth, often taught in scripture, and by Paul himself, of no

small moment practically for souls. But people, fancying that this was too strange a delusion to enter, gave the verb a sense which it never bears, and thus lost all real understanding of the passage, by adopting a false rendering which has plunged men into mistake ever since.

A favorite argument among some is that the church must be on earth till the Lord appears, because Timothy is, exhorted to keep the commandment spotless, irreproachable, until the appearing of our Lord. This however has been already shown to be a mere fallacy. Scripture connects responsible service, and also the walk of all saints with the day or the appearing, never with His coming as such or our translation to meet Him on high which is a matter of nothing but sovereign grace. But responsibility attaches to His appearing because, when we come with Him, our place is decided according to our measure of fidelity. To confound the two things is to lose the distinct truth and the special blessing of each to the soul. We are called to wait for Him with unclouded joy; but we are also bound, each to his particular work, and all of us to watch, abounding in mutual love, in order that our hearts be confirmed blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus.

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

Thus the argument betrays a want of spiritual understanding and right use of scripture. Besides, when looked into, it is quite inept. For employed as it is, it would deprive of its profit not only Timothy but all other men of God who pass hence before the Lord appears, and confine it to such as then remain on the earth. Whereas according to its real bearing it applies fully to him and all that follow in the same path of devoted obedience to the end. Asleep or alive when He cones, they will have their due place in the day of His appearing. And if this is true manifestly of the responsible servants in the word, still less can the mistaken notion apply to the church. In short it in no case implies remaining on earth till that day, which directly contradicts Col. 3:4, and is quite inconsistent with other scriptures which reveal the glorified saints accompanying Christ, and out of heaven too.

It is remarkable, and apparently little known, that the late Mr. B. W. Newton, the keenest advocate for identifying Christ's coming with His appearing or day, was in effect compelled to bow to the evidence of Rev. 19, and to confess that it “opens with one of the great results of the resurrection of the saints” (Thoughts on the Apocalypse, p. 297). Again (p. 290), “The saints have joined Him and fall into the train of His glory.” He does not contest that the marriage of the Lamb is in heaven, and the bride there before then. But this assuredly surrenders the principle, for which his disciples vainly contend with no small outcry. It is the grossest error therefore to look for the resurrection of those that compose the church, or of the O. T. saints in Rev. 20:4. Both are there undoubtedly, but already changed, in those seated on the thrones, to whom judgment was given. The raising from the dead which then follows is exclusively of the Apocalyptic sufferers, slain after the first general class of the glorified were caught up to be with the Lord. The two classes of martyrs (for there are two) are now seen to be raised, in order to share the reign with Christ for the thousand years. On all this the views commonly held are vague and erring. But the light conveyed by the scripture is as bright and simple as possible.

It is useless to search the Reformers any more than the Puritans for any real grasp or right estimate of sovereign grace in its heavenly portion. Their hearts did not dwell on or even turn to the rapture. Take the learned John Jewel, who wrote expressly on the Epistles to the Thessalonians (the only Exposition in his Works), edited by the Parker Society. But he never seems to rise beyond the Lord's coming to judge the quick and the dead. His descent in 1 Thess. 4:16 only draws out for comment, “Here is laid for us the true manner of the terrible judgment of God”... “Such shall be the show and the sight of the Son of God: He shall come down with majesty from heaven; the trumpet of God shall sound, and be heard from the one end of heaven to the other; and whosoever shall hear it shall quake with fear. [What! the bride at the Bridegroom!] Then shall He be the Judge over all flesh. Then He shall show Himself to be King of kings, and Lord of lords.” Even on ver. 17 he can only say, “We which shall see all these things shall also be caught up ourselves. But here you must notice that Paul speaketh not this of his own person, and of them that lived in his time, as if they should continue alive unto the end, or that the world should have an end before they should die; but he showeth what shall be the state of such whosoever shall then remain alive.”

Now this is to miss the beautiful intent of the Spirit through the apostle's words. If the meaning the then Bp. of Salisbury put into them had been intended, it would have been easy and alone correct to have written, We that must die shall rise first; then the living that remain shall be caught up together with us in clouds to meet the Lord in [or into] the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Surely those caught up should not be confounded with “all flesh.” The apostle (even in correcting the unfounded fancy that the deceased saints of their company must miss their part in that hour of unmingled joy) takes pains to confirm them in constant waiting for His coming. The bishop's view loses sight of the Holy Spirit's care to keep the saints in habitual expectancy, and therefore left, always uncertain when He might come, to look for Him day by day, hanging evermore on His assurance of love, “I am coming again” (John xiv.), without one word to fix a date, or cloud the heart, or delay the hope. To begin to settle that it cannot be in our time, is it not to say in the heart, “My lord delayeth,” the inlet to self-seeking and overbearing? Certainly not a hint was ever given by an inspired man that he or others then alive must survive to the Lord's coming, still less to the world's end. But the Christian was expressly set to wait and watch for Him as his most cherished object, and expressly kept always so looking, because he knows not the moment. It was in divine wisdom for the best good to be so ordered.

On 2 Thess. 2 the learned bishop starts off to warn against Popery, says not a word on the weighty opening verse, and on the second gets into the theme of “crafty and false teachers.” When he does speak of the advent, beyond quoting words of 1 Thess. iv. he looks for judgment and the passing away of heaven and earth, without any adequate sense of the revealed blessedness of our gathering together unto the Lord.

Nor is there in Protestant writers any more than Popish a sound conception of the awful revolt that is to befall professing Christians at the end of the age, or of the still more audacious rising up that follows of both the civil Beast of Rome, and the quasi-religious Beast of Jerusalem, in the power of Satan. For it will be a travesty of the three persons of the Godhead, and arrogate divine power and glory to the exclusion of the only true God, especially of the Father and the Son, through the energetic, and no longer checked, working of the evil spirit.

The exaggeration of truth is never the truth; and the exaggeration of the evil that now exists, whilst the mystery of lawlessness works, exposes souls to shut their ears against the divine warning, that the time hastens when the unconverted of Protestantism and of Popery will join the ever-growing host of open skeptics, all of whom will form Satan's human array in the last daring denial and defiance of Jehovah and His Anointed.

On 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 2:1, On

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 the epistles, understood and profited by the instruction conveyed. But it seems demonstrable that too soon afterward 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 “on behalf of” into their margin. It will be shown that neither suits the context. We are in no way limited to these re-flexions of the Greek, especially where connected with words of entreaty. The Authorized Version in the main point before us is substantially better; yet this misrendering has been considered by not a few as a decided improvement, because the aim or argument of the apostle is for the most part misapprehended.

In a comparatively minor detail of the verse that follows, 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 present the coming of the Lord Jesus and our gathering together unto Him as the 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 Authorized Version says “by,” the Revisers give “touching” in the text, and in the margin they add “Gr. in behalf of.” The usage of , 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 4pani;1, b7rEp is only found here, whereas ep. 7repi 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 Of. l`nrp 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” or “for the sake of?” “Now we beseech you, brethren, for (or, for the sake of) the corning of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him,” &c.

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. How far the Authorized 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, &c., 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 an oversight. They are distinct and even contrasted objects.

I cannot but think therefore that while the Authorized 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 plea (“for the sake of” or “for”) abode to the last and 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 rumor that the day of His judgment of the earth had come. Every one can understand, when it is brought before him, that such a consoling 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 association; as the subject-matter he treats of—the day—was full of terror, especially as misrepresented by some at Thessalonica.

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, &c?

Did not the Revisers, like others who have thur translated the clause, assume that the presence of coming of our Lord is identical with His day, and render verse 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 force 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.

Further, it is 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 i. 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 realized, 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. 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 on the other hand to the afflicted saints rest with Paul and his fellow-labourers, not when they 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 marveled at in all those that believed in that day. Such is the real matter in hand, not in a single phrase 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 Hun. The Revisers appear to have confounded the coming with the day of the Lord; whereas the one is the comfort 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 and person that restrains meanwhile must a fortiori be taken out of the way. For the mystery of lawlessness already works; not yet is the lawless one revealed till the restraint is gone. 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 naught, 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, 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 come with its terrors? To beseech them touching that day, which he had himself painted in the most vivid colors, not to be uneasy as if it were now present, seems vapid and lame, as unlike the accustomed energy and precision of the apostle as can be conceived.

That there is a marked distinction between the Lord's coming and His day had already been laid before the Thessalonians in chapters iv. and v. of the First Epistle respectively. Verses 15-17 of chap. iv. 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 chap. v. 1-3 plainly opens out the dread effect of that day when it comes on 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, which is a further and subsequent part 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

On 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 2:2, On

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 dreamed 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 that they 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 this “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 Authorized 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; 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” (4veaTUr1a) 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,” O aiisvv aTOS or O vuv abin, as the apostle calls it in Rom. 12:2 and 1 Tim. 6:17, contrasted with “that” or “the coming age” (Luke 8:20; 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, and the Lord reigning in displayed power and glory instead of being as now hid in God. So even the different and future form, e_VITT,o-ovTat in 2 Tim. 3:1, 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 Authorized 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 Trom (Concord. Gr. in Sept. i. 529) cites from Theodotion's version of

Dan. 7:5 is a ridiculous blunder, Eh' icalpovs evecmithi. The Aldine etas not so far wrong, yet reading 49 11,4)0in which is hardly intelligible, and it has the same error as to the verb. The Complutensian gave it rightly, EiS. pipos Ev itr-reiOv as in the Alexandrian and Vatican MSS. The Chisian copy of the true Septuagint gives 47ri TOa evos 7rXevpoi; eaTfiet. But this effaces the only instance save in the Apocryphal books; where Trom gives 3 Esdras 5, 72 [47], 9, 6, 1 Mac. xii. 44 • 2 Mac. 17; iv. 43; xii. 3, every one of which confirms the Revised Version in all respects, and the Authorized Version in every case save the unfounded “is at hand” before us.

It may be added that the word, at least in the perfect, 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, of 274, 6. The three instances, like the rest cited by Deans Liddell and Scott, in their admirable Lexicon(Aristoph. Nub. 779, Isaeus 88. 40, Dem. 896, 29), are of the usual import, not “imminent” but “present,” actually begun and going on. In each the suit was already begun, even if still pending. It is the same beyond doubt with O vbv evecnipciiisLycurg. 148, 32; TOO 6,ECIT. 14711/09, Phil. ap.Dem. 280. 12 means the present month, not one soon coming; and so does EVE07. MAE/LOS in Aesch. 35, 27. And xp(ivos dv means the present, not future tense; as vaey.taTa ev., Plat. Legg. 378 B, means wounds inflicted, not merely threatened; and Ta ev., or ev. 77-pc7,11,ara, 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 therefore, in writings as well profane as sacred, is “present,” not “at hand.”

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. 13:12), but that it had actually come. The mischievous men were probably of similar type as Hymenmus and Philetus, “who concerning the truth have 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. Some such attenuation by giving a present bearing is as easily understood, if not more so, as of the day of the Lord. 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 Isa. 3; 7 and still more evidently xiii., and xix.; and what can be clearer than that a then sweeping and exterminating judgment on a people and country, as then on Babylon or on Egypt, is called the “day of the Lord” on them, though 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, illustrates 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? but a day which, however it might fall on any in a measure though Medes or Persians, though Greeks or Romans, looks onward to its completeness really when the Lord rises up to shake not the earth only but also heaven. Compare Zeph. 1:7-18 with iii. 8-20, Zech. 12-14

Now it is very intelligible that a misleader might avail himself of this germinant or partial application of the prophecies in ancient times to affirm that the sore troubles and persecution the Thessalonians were then enduring along with external distress, and political convulsion, &c., were the proof (not indeed of Christ's presence, or that the saints were 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, but) 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 I must reiterate the apostle could entreat them by 1 (or, for the sake of) His presence and our gathering together unto Him, that they should not credit the alarming rumor that His day was there. That is, every believer in his senses could not but know that Christ had not come, but sat in heaven still, and that the saints were still 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 yet the 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. They are to appear from heaven following Christ to bring in that day. See Rev. 17:14; 19:14. In order to this they must be translated there before and we see them symbolized as in heaven from Rev. 4 and onward.

The phraseology too, if scrutinized, will be found consistent only with this view, irreconcilable with the popular confusion which clouds these verses. For the apostle is beseeching the Thessalonians, as we have seen, “that ye be not quickly shaken in [lit.. from your] mind 2 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 offense against every sound exegetical principle to imagine that “the coming of the Lord” in verse l differs from that which had been so distinctly revealed in the first Epistle, ch. iv., so equally are we bound to interpret “the day of the Lord” here with what was laid down in ch. v. 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 figurative coming of the Lord are on the same ground with the fabulists of Thessalonica who insinuated a figurative clay 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 moaning of either term is excluded from these epistles, which in all 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.

(Brown's Christ's Second Coming, sixth edition, pp. 4249, 425-433; Elliott's Horn Apocalyptim, fifth edition, 91 et sego., iv. 184-187.)

We are told by excellent and intelligent Christians that the apostle's object here was to calm down the toe ardent or wild anticipation of the Lord's immediate return. But as to this the prevalent confusion meets us. It took a stirring form, saysits 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 euffeTykce never means this but “is present"]. Is it not passing strange that able Christian men who differ very 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” 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,” oven 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 moaning. 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.3

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 color and currency to the wholly distinct and false insinuation that the day of the Lord was come.

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” (0-racuo;jpai) 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” (0p060-0a,), which (less, if possible, than (7) 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 fear or hope might produce this result; but nothing of the kind is implied here in chapter ii.

It will be seen that all this warping of details, as well as false teaching 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 judgment-day false alarm 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, &c., 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; and it in no way emanated from really earnest Christians, but from fraudulent men who misled them. Tertulliau and Chrysostom are right, Whitby &c. 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 (vapovaia) 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 figurative?4 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 realized) against the imposture that the day of the Lord was come. The truth is that the post-millennial coming is a myth, not less certainly than the Thessalonian delusion about the day, and every form of the popular misinterpretation based on the false translation of these verses„ especially of e_ CT)/!GEV in verse 2. To argue on the . 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.

On 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 2:3, On

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 zealous 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 sin1 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,” &c. 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 Authorized Versions so far rightly cleave to “the day.” 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 punish 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 rumor, whatever the authority claimed for it, that “the day” had come already. The Lord at any rate had clearly not come: else the saints had been at once gathered together unto Him. above. But His presence indisputably was not yet a fact; and it would, when fulfilled, preserve them from the overwhelming experiences of that day, as the hope of it in their souls would deliver them from those vain fables and fears. His coming, or presence, is not the opening but precursor of the day of the Lord; His appearing does synchronize with that day.

But the saints were liable to be beguiled in other ways: hence the fresh warning, and the distinct instruction that the apostasy 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 Authorized translators have utterly weakened the sense by rendering . “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. iv. 1, where “apostatize” 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 apostatize 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, &c. It is an ascetic departure front the faith in the pretension to superior sanctity, but real denial of God's rights as Creator and grace as Savior. Here 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 characterize 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; 32, Psa. 10—xiv., Isa. 65; 66, Dan. 7:8, 11, 25; 9:27, may suffice for the Old Testament. In the New one may cite Matt. 12:31, 32, 43-45, Luke 17:26-30; 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 apostasy than many Christians do. Even the Aeusstilmans 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 characterized the world before the gospel; and 2 Timothy had already prepared us for it. But “the apostasy” 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 Savior 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 fullness 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 our chapter 8) identifies him with the man of sin; and xxx 33, lvii. 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 false prophet who in Rev. 19 perishes with the last head of the fourth empire revived, or first beast from the sea.

Irreligious as he is, he none the less is a religious power, and is indeed such distinctively as compared with the then Emperor, the great political head of the West, as he is the religious chief in the East. 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 to 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 Grotins, Wetstein, Whitby, &c., 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, recognized 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 shall work countless things, and provide 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, &c., 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, &c., 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 be well, and I believe is really, meant to express one who is both a person and a power, as may be shown in its place.

And though it be true that “the king of the north” and “the 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 recognizable. 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, &c. 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 Philadephus; 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” culminates the main interest of all the previous series; and 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. And, what makes this 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.

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, honoring 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 the 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, with 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 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.”

On 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 2:4, On

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 come 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 Authorized 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 spirits 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 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 further 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. Psa. 16; 22; 40; 69; 62; 75; 91; 101; 102; Prov. 8; Isa. 9; 11; 12; 25; 42; 49; 1; 52; 53 lix., lx., lxi., lxiii., are ample testimonies from a small part of Scripture. But indeed space fails to merely 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 to receive the full and final representative of selfishness, which Satan will bring before them in the Antichrist of the latter day. “Him” said the Savior, “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. (chap. ii. 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 expression 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-confession; 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 work, 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?

But 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 mbst 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 modem 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 two-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 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: it is the antagonist of God we have, not the conqueror of kings or captains. He opposes and exalts himself exceedingly against every one called God or object of veneration. It is deliberate and unspeakable arrogance in putting down all rivalry; yet it is not the mere negation of God, but this 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 temple, whether of the believer's body or 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 apostasy, 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 Savior 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, no earthly representive. 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 is the man of sin 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 Savior, 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 man. Not that He ever 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 will fully do this son of perdition 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, as 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 he in the hand 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 no 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.

On 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 2:5-7, On

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 by inspiration 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 vi)v with TO K. like Macknight and others. It is simply resumptive with Kai, a particle of transition and not temporal, which is the less necessary as we have subsequently.; apTi. 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; and 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 an 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 at 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 baptized, certainly animated with hatred of all restraint, yet notwithstanding their irreligion or infidelity skilful and eager to avail themselves of Scriptural words,

facts, and principles in order to overthrow not only all recognition and honor of God, but all reality of human government. This is among the premonitions of the approaching apostasy, 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 He 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 they 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 license. 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 that civolit'a, 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 rapavoaia (as the verb in Acts 23:3 and the noun in 2 Peter 2:16). The usual term for such a violation or transgression of law is vapitfinats (Rom. 2:23; 4:13; 5:14 &c.) The truth is that aveitla is both a wider and a deeper word, as we may 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 eivo,uia (properly speaking) is found. For, the apostle declares (Rom. 2), as many as sinned without law shall also perish without law; and 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 avolda. For this is precisely the designation of their state; and besides, as a universal principle 7) afizapria eff7;1,?) AVOILIC I. 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 ease? 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, learned to corrupt and pervert the truth; as its idea of grace was the 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 looks for 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.1 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 roadie worke which only loketh, untill it be taken out of the way.” (Ed. 1534.) That of Crammer (1539) resembles the rendering of Alford and Ellicott, save that “only” with thew precedes “until:” “tyll he which now only letteth be taken out of the waye.” Geneva led the way in substance for the Authorized Version. The Revisers appear to me justified in their Version, save that “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 to plain to be misconstrued. Nor are they in any version at all known, not 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 Polygott. 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 midst2 &c. 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 etc peao0 to signify removal or taking away! which he argues is “derived entirely” from the connected ciprisraf, arpw, erCpx. (Acts 23:10 Cor. 5:9; 2 Cor. 6:17); whereas eyht. 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 grcereat or KaKjailat, to sit or sit down; yet Wesseling, a competent scholar, properly interprets the phrase, seceders e medio. The truth is precisely opposed to this objector, for it is,KT. 11,. which lends the force of secession to the verb. Compare Eur. Electra 797, where Paley takes gK. ft. as meaning apart from the company; but it is probably abruptly or in the midst. Wetstein 311) long ago cited Anton. viii. 12,,uttcpciv, Ka; Teevtitca, Kai vaur' etc plesov, I am dead, and all gone. Let me add Dion C who in his H. R. says of Lucullus (ed. Sturz. i. 188) that he kept aloof from both, EK liE070 (1,407y, and similarly of others (i. 686, ii. 48, 768), save that in the last the connected word is 4117(19, which is akin to 71v. In i. 388 Nepos is said to have withdrawn himself 4K T. a. away. Now we need not dwell on passages like that of Demosth. de Cor. (Reiske i. 323) where aveXcivras is connected with etc pecov, “putting away,” or laying aside; or again yet earlier, di'. eK p. in his Fourth Philippians (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 109) tyvm KCIO' ZallTial, 4K /1140'0V 71,0110109, he decided to live by himself away from all. Achilles Tatius, ii. 27 (ed. Boden, 186) has 74;9 lOtetok 4K pecrov yevo pew, submotaClione, “if Clio be removed.” Is it not plain then that the scholarship which could deny to 4,c p. 7. 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 I had written when a third modification from the same source meets me, somewhat more sober, and mainly brought about by a passage in Aeschines' Epist. xii. (Reiske iii. 695), where is another instance, EK pb7011 Iff:1,011411.1,, referring to men dead or exiled. In either case they were “gone away.” H. Stephens need not be summoned to inform us that yev4pfpos cannot be rendered “taken away” (sublatus), though this sense he unhesitatingly gives to the whole phrase. Every scholar knows the wide range of meanings 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 7. But even so, calling “out of the midst” of the cloud, or raising up a Prophet “from among” (though here it is probably 6, only) their 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 4IC represents “out of” and eIC p. “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; 9:7, Luke 3:22; 9:25, Gal. 4:4, 1 Tim. 6:4, Heb. 9:3; when not one has eic p. 7. but only 7.eK, which last nobody disputes may mean development? And why cite the identification by Hederich of erc p. ry. (at least in Eur. Iph. in Aul. 342) with 41, p.; 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,” &c., the other, “out of the way,” &c., somewhat like the stronger t7piroitZt, and EK.VattIV. That mind must be singularly constituted which could regard a—. or KaeJr. in Herod. as giving the meaning of “secession"! quite as much as ai'pto 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 ex p. 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 eK ft. 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 eipei 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.

On 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 2:8, On

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 naught by the manifestation of his coming” (verse 8).

It will be no longer the mystery or secret of lawlessness, but his own time for the son of perdition to be revealed (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 had 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 its worst development suppressed, break fully out 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 honor 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 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. i. 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 prEeterists, such as Grotius, Wetstein, Hammond, Whitby, le Clerc, Schottgen, Hardouin, &c,. 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, &c.) 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 the Apostle 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 (4:13-18), and as to His day for the surprise and judicial destruction of the world (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 that, after explaining in chap. i. 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 rumor 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 unbiased person fail to see that the 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 a 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; 19:1; 30:27-33, Mic. 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 pretense 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 far, 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. It is not merely His coming, but the appearing or manifestation of it which destroys the lawless one, This 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 “illustration” in the Vulgate helped on looseness of interpretation; which first found expression in Wiclif and last in the Authorized 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 rumor. 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"1 as well as “destroy” in Dan. 2:44; 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 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 wicked 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 D F G L, 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 apostles 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 apostasy 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 (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 forever 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 fullness 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 predestined 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.

On 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12, On

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, Psa. 33:6, or judicial, 2 Sam. 22:16, Job 4:9, Psa. 18:15, Isa. 11:4; 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 tie 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 for1 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.” (ver. 9-12.)

The Lord Jesus is the Son of God, and in Him all the fullness 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 anathematizing 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 practiced 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 be 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 xix. It is the second beast, who 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. xi. 3639), 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 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 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: 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 characterizes 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 in seducing men to their ruin in Satan's power; as before we had his blasphemous and self-exalting 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 apostasy; 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 in their apostacy from the gospel and rebellion against Himself. “And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe falsehood.” So there was with Pharoah in Egypt after slighting ample appeals and solemn signs; so there 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.”

Let me say 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 thecontext 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 Authorized 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 not 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.

On 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, On

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] beginning1 unto salvation in sanctification of [the] Spirit and belief of [the] truth; whereunto2 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 were 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 fruit 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 honor, 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, 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 naive. It is that operation which meets a man when a sinner, and by grace constitutes him a saint. People are willing to allow it afterward 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 Rom. 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 Rom. 8:2, though the latter alone describes the proper condition of a Christian. Practical holiness follows in the exhortation of Rom. 12, &c.

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” &c., which the Rhemish version (1682) 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.” No doubt it was the influence of Theodore de Bze, which acted so banefully on the English exiles; for he in his just preceding version 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. I have not the first edition of 1556 (R. Stoph. Genesis) to see whether his annotations even then wore so audacious; but in his Greek and Latin New Testament of 1565, as later, he boldly says, “Ad sanctificationem Spiritus, . Id ..... Erasmus, Per sanctificationem Spiritus; non sails apposite. Per obedientiam, . Id est , &c.” 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 proofs 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 Béze, 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 must often be and is rightly rendered “by” or “with,” not “through” like ; as 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 never can be in such a context the meaning of . 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 the 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 . 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 . = . 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 spur 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 as 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 honored 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 fullness 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 obtain glory, but “to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” As He is the One in whom all the divine counsels center 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.”

On 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 2:15-17, On

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 afore 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 He 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 stablish1 in every good work and word.” (Ver. 15-17.)

There can not be asked a more conclusive disproof of that ecclesiastical consciousness ( ) which Dr. J. A. Moehler (Symbolik, § 37) 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 colored 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 enjoyed 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 stand firm, and hold fast the traditions which ye were taught whether by word or by letter of ours” (ver. 13). 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 mold 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 coordinate authority, such as its tradition cannot but assume to be. For this supposes defect in scripture, and claims, though human, nothing less than divine honor. 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 traditions 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 honor 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 supercedes ministry. For the right exercise of every gift from Christ (and all real ministers are His gifts or 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 neutralize extraneous influence of every kind, as well as judge and destroy hindrances from within. So the soul realizes 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 favored 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 learned—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 you in every good work and word” (ver. 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 everlasting 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.

The meaning of the last verb in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 is not “at hand,” but “is present.” I am not aware of a single case where this form of word could have any other meaning. Nor does it occur seldom in the New Testament: see Rom. 8:38; 1 Corinthians 3:22; 7:26; Gal. 1:4; Heb. 9:9, in all which it unequivocally means present, repeatedly in express contrast with what is at hand or future. In 2 Timothy, is a different form of the word; but there too it means that difficult times shall be there, not merely imminent. These are all the occurrences in the New Testament. Without exception, they are every one clear and explicit in their sense as to this. “The day of the Lord is at hand” would be a different phrase. When the apostle means “at hand” he says so, using quite another word. Further, this erroneous version, as in the English Bible, makes the apostle contradict himself, for the Epistle to the Romans tells the Romans that “the day is at hand.” How then could the misleaders at Thessalonica be consistently charged with error if they only taught that the day of the Lord is at hand—the same thing he afterward teaches himself? But no; these false teachers had given out that the day was (not coming ever so soon, but) actually arrived; and this was filling the saints with panic, especially as they pretended to a revelation for it, and even more, as we shall see.

There is an indubitable sign of false teachers that I must here commend to the notice of all Christians, for we need it in these days, and may need it yet more if the Lord tarry. Observe then that the false teacher ordinarily does one or two things, sometimes both: either he lulls asleep those who ought to be roused, keeping them entranced in the deadly slumber of fallen nature, or he tries to alarm true believers by endeavoring to shake their confidence in the grace and truth of God, filling their minds with groundless alarm. Not possessing peace himself, he is often deceived as well as a deceiver; for he knows not in his own experience peace and joy in believing. The false teacher then either injures the children of God by weakening their confidence in God, or, at the same time with this, he lulls with opiates those whom God would have to be awakened from their dangerous insensibility. In short false teachers either flatter the world or try to alarm the true children of God.

The truth does exactly the contrary; it always has for its effect to rouse men from their state of guilty indifference or their self-confidence, setting before them their fearful danger for eternity. But it tells them of a divine Savior and of a present salvation. Along with this there is the comforting, establishing, and leading on of the believers into all their privileges and responsibilities, their proper joys in communion with the Lord and one another, and their growth in the knowledge of His mind and ways for worship and service. For all these things are the portion of the believer.

What were those about who misled the Thessalonians? They pretended to the word and Spirit for their cry that the day of the Lord was come; false teachers often do as much. But they did more; they grew bolder in their iniquity; they pretended to have a letter of the Apostle Paul affirming that “the day of the Lord was present.” I am aware that some learned men have thought they alluded to the former epistle. Thus Paley1 says that the apostle writes in the second epistle, among other purposes, to quiet this alarm and to rectify the misconstruction that had been put on his words; in that the passage in the second epistle relates to the passage in the first. But this is an oversight. It is certain and evident that the epistle alluded to here was not his; for he says “that ye be not soon shaken in mind or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us.” He does not say the letter that we wrote, but a letter as from us, or purporting to be from us. It was a supposititious letter, not his first epistle.

The pretended letter of the apostle was to the effect that the day of the Lord was already come; but the day of the Lord, according to the Bible, in general will be one of trouble and anguish, a day of clouds and darkness for the world. You may read this abundantly in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, and many of the prophets. On what pretext then was the cry raised at Thessalonica? The Thessalonians were suffering great trouble and persecution for the truth's sake. The false teachers seem to have converted this into that day, alleging that the day of the Lord had come. All indeed knew it to be a day of fearful trial, and that all meanwhile goes on worse and worse till the evil is then put down and the power of God victorious. Hence the saints that did look for that day, according to the first epistle, became troubled by this cry and were shaken in mind. For, as we have seen, false teachers naturally shake the righteous, instead of seeking to comfort and stablish them. On this occasion they contrived to excite no little panic and anxiety as if the day of the Lord had actually come.

Not at all, says the apostle: do you not know that the Lord is coming to gather you to Himself?

“We beseech you, brethren, by2 the coming (or presence) of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind nor troubled.” He first appeals to a known motive of joy and confidence in their hope and then goes into a prophetic reason, thus giving the idea a complete refutation. But you may notice that it is never supposed the saints wait for the day of the Lord to be taken up and meet Him in the air. It is the coming of the Lord they await for this.

“The coming of the Lord” and “His day” are two quite different thoughts often confounded by men.

The coming or presence () of the Lord is a much wider term, embracing the day as well as what is just before the day. But the part of His coming that is called “the day of the Lord” consists of the execution of His judgment on the earth and then of His reign. The first object is to gather those He loves home. Love would always secure the object of affection first.

The coming of the Lord then is bound up closely with the gathering of the saints; the day of the Lord with the execution of judgment on His enemies here below. Hence we find here, “let no man deceive you by any means.” It is evident there might be a great deal of mistake on this subject; “for that day shall not come except there, come the falling away (or apostasy) first.” “That day shall not come” is an insertion of our translators, marked therefore by italics, though, I believe, substantially correct. It should not be till the apostasy, the public abandonment of Christianity throughout Christendom. Oh, how men deceive themselves, when they think that all is going on to progress and triumph! There will be victory when Christ comes, not before. What is revealed is a very different and more humbling prospect. The distinct intimation is that ["that day shall not come"] except there come the falling away first, the apostasy. And what is the character of modern infidelity, but preparing the way for the apostasy; men bearing the Christian name, yet giving up all the Christian substance; men who still carry on the dead forms while the spirit has fled? This will grow and extend, and men are getting ready for it too. They are destroying everywhere on earth the outward and public recognition of the truth. There will soon be no outward homage paid to Christianity in Europe. I mean that the governments of the world are gradually stripping off all connection with the Christian name. There are those who think this is a great boon. Though I have not the smallest interest or affinity for established religion, I cannot but think the act criminal and that this will turn out more serious than the reformers expect. I believe it was a most serious evil when the Christians accepted an alliance with the world; but it is a totally different and most solemn issue for the world when it casts off all its connection with Christianity.

It was a deep loss for the Christians when they sought the world's recognition; it will be an awful day for the world when it, is so tired of the union as to throw off Christianity.

The consequence will be that that most slender tie which binds and attaches men to the reading of the Bible or going to church will be broken when it has no longer connection with the government. You may live to see the vast change which will take place. I grant that there is no reality, no divine life, there is no true honor paid to the Lord, in carrying on a mere outward profession; but people who go to church, as it is called, hear the word of God and the name of Christ. When this is no longer publicly recognized, they will give it up as an antiquated prejudice, and go to shoot, fish, ride, or drink. They will amuse themselves in reading anything but the Bible. There will be the most rapid decay. Not so with the saints of God. The result will be, no doubt, that the real will be the more evident. They will rest only on the word of God; but as regards men of the world, it will bring about the apostasy.

This is what is before the world!

The First Epistle to the Thessalonians was also the first written by the apostle; the Second, from the nature of the case, was written shortly after. Thus, from the very beginning of Christianity—from the first communications of the Spirit of God to the churches—such is the solemn result of which they were warned. Those who profess the gospel will abandon it ere the end of this age come. But that day is not to be “except there come the falling away first.” It is not merely a falling away here, and a falling away there, but the falling away, or the apostasy.

Further, “That man of sin will be revealed, the son of perdition.” There was once a man of righteousness—the Savior; but He was rejected. There will be a man of sin—the son of perdition “who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped.” I am aware that many people apply this to the Pope of Rome.

I do not for a moment agree with them, though regarding the system as a frightful delusion, even Babylon. But I dare not say that the apostasy has arrived yet, and it is a sorrowful thing to use Scripture with a party aim, or for controversial objects; it is a sorrowful thing in the presence of growing evil, which pervades both Protestant and Catholic countries alike—a sorrowful thing to cast such a stone from one to the other. No, beloved friends, the apostasy is the result of despising the gospel, of trifling with the truth, of keeping up forms that are unreal, and then casting them off with shame.

The apostasy will be the result wherever Christendom extends. Wherever the gospel has been preached, or at any rate the Lord professed, the apostasy will be the issue, whether of Catholics or Protestants, whether of Greeks or Copts or any others; such will be the result, not outside but within Christendom. It does not mean the end of the Jews, or of the heathen. The apostle is here speaking of that broad scene wherever the name of the Lord has been professed. “The day of the Lord cannot be, except there come the falling away first and the man of sin be revealed.” The climax is that lawless one who “exalteth himself.” Jesus humbled Himself, and only exalted God. Here is a man, the man of sin pre-eminently, the personal adversary of the Lord Jesus. And, as the Lord said to the Jews, they would not have Him who came in His Father's name; they will receive him who comes in his own name. At the end of this age he will come, and accordingly he is found as Satan's winding-up, not merely of apostate Christianity, but of apostate Judaism also.

I have already shown the connection with Christendom, but now I will briefly touch on Judaism, for this personage “opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

As the true church began in Jerusalem, the great result of the apostasy will find itself conspicuously in Jerusalem. It was this city that saw Pentecost; so far as the world could behold, it beheld that which belongs to heaven on the earth.

Jerusalem will see the judgment. of that which, long a counterfeit, will end in a manifestation of hell — the fruit of the amalgam of Christianity with Judaism. So the apostle reminds them, “Remember ye not that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things. And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.”

There is a withholding power. What is that power? I cannot doubt it is the Holy Ghost. It is not evil which so opposes evil, but good. That which effectually hinders the outbreak of the power of Satan is not the energy of mortal man. I am aware the ancients used to think it was the Roman empire. This being long gone led some to conceive that the papacy is meant by the beast, as well as the apostasy, the man of sin, &c. But I am not prepared to allow that the beast is come yet. The “mystery of iniquity” is working still. It was working then, and is working now; but even now it does not show itself in its most horrible colours. The apostle says, “The mystery of iniquity doth already work: only there is one now who letteth (or resttaineth), until he be taken out of the way.” Thus you see the hindering power is to disappear. Further, it is both a principle and a person (being spoken of as neuter as well as masculine); it can therefore apply to none so well as the Spirit of God, who still, for the sake of the children of God, and to sustain His testimony, continues to hinder the first manifestation of Satan's power. But then that is only for a time, it will not be for ever. “Only there is one who now letteth until he be taken out of the way.” The Spirit of God will by and by cease to stand in the way of the working of the Evil One. “And then shall that lawless one be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the shining forth (or appearing) of His coming.” The Lord Jesus is the appointed destroyer of this lawless being, the one who is elsewhere called the antichrist. Even now there are many antichrists, says John; when the antichrist comes, he will be destroyed by the Lord Jesus coming from heaven and publicly. Then shall that lawless one be revealed whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the spirit of His mouth. he critical addition of “Jesus” I put in, because it is certainly genuine and gives more definiteness to the thought.

Now mark the first verse. The apostle does not say the appearing of His coming when Christ gathers the saints. “We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him.” Here, when the destruction of the man of sin is in question, he speaks not merely of His coming but of the appearing—the epiphany or brightness—of His coming. If when the Lord comes to gather His saints He appears, why should not His appearing be brought in there? Is it not manifest that the coming of the Lord does not of necessity mean His appearing? How else the phrase of verse 8? It was necessary, when His appearing was meant, to say so; and this is when He judges. When it is the dealing of is grace in translating us to heaven, His coming or presence is named, but not a word about His appearing. When the lawless one shall be destroyed, it is not merely His presence or coming, but the shining forth of it. For He might come without being seen beyond what He pleased; but here we have the manifestation of His advent. When He comes to take up His saints, what will he world have to do with it? It was His own love which saved them; they belonged to Him, not to the world. He comes to claim His own. He does not make the world a spectator before He appears in glory for the destruction of the antichrist.

The world will have bowed down to the antichrist. Gentiles as well as Jews will have accepted him. Just as the blessed Lord Jesus is both the true Messiah and the God of Israel, so this false personage, the man of sin, will set up to be both the Messiah and Jehovah of Israel, and the

mass will be led away by the fatal delusion. The same unbelief which rejects the true will bow down to the false.

These are the dismal prospects of the world according to the Scriptures. A very different future fills the imagination of men generally. Why wonder at this? How can they truly prognosticate what is to be? No man can discern the future unless he believes the prophecies of God.

I am aware they will tell you how dangerous it is to predict. But the study of prophecy is calculated and meant to keep us from predicting. Those who study prophecy should be humble enough to be content with prophecy. If you despise the prophecies of God, you may set up to be a prophet; but, if so, you must always be a false one. It is only God who knows and can tell the future. But God has revealed it: we have the responsibility of believing. A man cannot believe these things without their leaving their impress upon his heart. If you have truth in your heart, show it in your hand and on your forehead, seeking to prove true to what you believe. The Lord Jesus is coming; but He is going to appear also, not merely coming to receive His own, for His coming will be in the twinkling of an eye. That the world should see the change and translation of the saints is not at all necessary, for the Lord has many ways of taking His own to Himself without death. Suppose the Lord were to cause a tremendous earthquake to happen, would not the wise men of the world say that the Christians had been swallowed up in the earthquake? It is easy enough to conceive a way in which the Lord could conceal the matter; but He does not conceal from us, nor will He from men, what He will do to the misleader of the world. This, at least, will be manifest to every eye. Hence we find that, whenever judgment is in question, manifestation characterizes it. When the Lord Jesus called Saul of Tarsus, his companions felt the tokens of some extraordinary action going on, though they knew nothing about itself. There were not a few men in the throng going to Damascus, yet only one man saw the Lord Jesus; all the rest only heard an inarticulate sound. They did not hear the words of His mouth; Saul of Tarsus did. Then, again, we find Philip caught up and carried to another place; but what did the world know of all that? There was a subsequent occasion when the apostle Paul was caught up into the third heaven. But was this divulged for the good of the world?

Nothing, then, is easier than for the Lord to show things in a partial way on these occasions; but He will do them on a grand comprehensive scale when the judgment of the world comes, after taking on high His people previously.

Manifestation is always connected with the world's portion. The Lord, when He comes for the saints, will manifest Himself to them of course; but that He will manifest Himself to the world is nowhere said in the Bible. There is a positive intimation that it will not be so at the end. “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we [be not caught up but] appear with Him in glory.” Consequently, the world cannot have seen Christ when He came to take His people. The very same moment that the world sees Christ appearing in glory they will see the saints appearing in glory along with Him. If Christ could appear before the saints were caught up the Scriptures would be contradicted.

I will refer to one Scripture more before I close; and it is a very solemn one. It is from Rev. 17. There are two great objects of judgment brought before us there. One is called the great harlot, the other is the beast. The first object is seen sitting upon many waters, “with whom the kings of the earth,” &c. (1St to 6th verse.) That is a corrupt woman, seated upon a most remarkably characterized beast, a beast with seven heads and ten horns. What is the meaning of these two symbols? You may easily gather it by comparing the 1St verse with the 9th and 10th verses of chap. 21, “And there came one of the seven angels,” &c.

Now it is plain from this, that the one is the counterpart of the other; that Babylon, the harlot, is Satan's sad contrast to the bride, the Lamb's wife. As the one is the holy city, the bride of the Lamb, the other corrupts herself with the kings of the earth, and corrupts them. This explains why she is styled “harlot.” She is the great ruling city of the world, which has her kingdom over the kings. The church glorified, the body of Christ, the Lamb's wife, is said to be “the holy city, Jerusalem,” that comes down out of heaven from God. This, then, is the holy (not the great) city. “He showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem.” The word “great” ought to be expunged, and the word “holy” transposed to take its place— “the holy city, Jerusalem.”

But still, the very fact that the holy city, Jerusalem, is the church glorified, gives the greatest possible help towards understanding what Babylon means. What is the religious body which, under the shelter of Christ's name, pretends to be the mother of all the churches? Can one hesitate?

I grant you that much evil has been done by what is called established churches, the national body of this country, and the national body of that; but what is this in comparison with the pretensions of her that claims all countries and tongues, kings aw well as subjects? Can there be any question who and what she is? Has there ever been any but one?

There can be no reasonable doubt about the meaning of Babylon; but as if to preclude the possibility, we have several marks. First, she is a persecuting power,3 the greatest of all persecutors, drunk with the blood of the saints. Have you not heard of an ecclesiastical body which thinks it her duty, for the love of God and the good of men's souls, to exterminate heretics? She is herself as innocent as Pilate. She kills none; she only hands them over to the civil power to be punished! Alas! there never was a Pagan power, there never was a Jewish frenzy, which so tortured the saints of God as Babylon has done. So clear is her identification that I do not require to point her out. Surely the truth must be indeed evident when it is unnecessary to name who she is.

Nor is this nearly all we are told here. The last verse says, “The woman is the great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth.” There is a distinction of importance. This chapter does not confound the harlot and the woman. For the woman is here declared to be the symbol of the ruling city. This is unquestionable. Now there never was one that ruled as this city did. The better you know history the more you will feel that Rome only it can be. There was but one city which ruled more and longer than any empire since the world began; and everybody in John's day would know where that city lay and what was its name.

It was not Athens—for Athens could never for any considerable time rule even Greece. It was not Jerusalem before nor Constantinople since. Some think that this chapter refers to the literal Babylon of Chaldea; but this was a city built on the plain of Shinar. How could such a city be truly said to be built on seven hills? The Chaldean capital had been a great city; it passed away, and only remained to occupy the curiosity of the learned men. Here was one then ruling over the kings of the earth. There was but one city that could he said so to reign in the days of John, and no one ever has so reigned since.

This city was to become the harlot, and so to exercise power over the Roman beast or empire, the beast of seven heads and of ten horns. But at first sight there is a difficulty here; for the Roman empire has disappeared. It existed and has fallen. How then are we to understand the chapter? The historian tells us that the Roman empire long ago declined and fell. There he stops; he cannot lift the veil. Not history explains

prophecy, but prophecy explains history. Prophecy is the true and divine key to the prospects of the world. Accordingly here is the explanation—the beast that then was, the Roman beast, would cease to exist. “The beast that thou sawest was, and is not.” Its vast power was to perish; and the infidel historian chronicles the fact. But you have another thing which history could not divine. If God's word is true and sure, the Roman beast is to revive. It is well known that its revival has been essayed. Charlemagne tried; Napoleon the First tried; Napoleon the Third would have liked well to have tried. Not that I have sympathy with those who pretend to point out the person. There were many that fixed on the last-named fallen potentate; and a few cling to their notion still [1873]. They are premature: better leave guess-work to such as do not search into prophecy.

Here is the word of God. Why should you predict? You had better not pretend to it; the word of God has spoken already; be you content with its predictions. Now the word of God has said nothing of the sort; it speaks of the beast that should ascend out of the bottomless pit, or abyss, and go into perdition. Why add to this? Why speculate? Let us only believe. Diabolical power will revive the Roman empire. “And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not; and yet is.” The common reading “and yet is” ( ) is incorrect. “And shall be present” ( ) is the true sense. Here, then, we have the clearest intimation that the Roman empire is to be reconstructed under the worse influence before the age ends and the Lord returns in judgment.

Let us look back for a moment at the history of the world, and compare it with the present and the future.

In the time of John the Roman empire ruled the known world. That empire had then but one governor or chief. Gradually the power began to weaken and wane. First came the division into east and west. Then some time afterward the Germanic barbarians broke up the Western empire and founded those separate kingdoms, of Europe, which, after feudalism, passed on to the constitutional monarchies of modern times. Such has been the result of the breaking up of the Roman empire. Here we find the two conditions: the beast that was, the beast that is not. But it “shall ascend out of the bottomless pit.” This will be a new trait in the world's history. The worst of powers is better than anarchy; the most grinding tyrannies are safer than no authority at all. So, it is evident that, whatever changes may have occurred in the world's affairs, there has never been a power without the sanction of God, had as its exercise of authority may have been. The letting loose of the power of Satan is not yet, because there is One who withholds (2 Thess. 2); but when He withdraws the hindrance, the beast ascends out of the bottomless pit. John of course speaks symbolically of the Roman empire in its last Satanic uprising and state. In the end of this age Satan will be allowed by God to re-establish that great object of human ambition. Men are even now yearning after an energetic central authority in the West. It is the plain fact that the ten horns, or kingdoms (supposing for the moment that the kingdoms of Western Europe comprised just ten) have no political coherence. One of their marked features has been that they are constantly in danger of war with each other. They have sought by what they term “the balance of power,” to maintain a measure of mutual understanding, peace, and order. But in consequence of this very arrangement no one power has been allowed to get the upper hand.

Many have desired it; but the result of their desires, when action has followed before the time, is that such perish. But by and by it will be accomplished. Then the beast will be reconstituted. There will be unity, one central authority, without extinguishing the separate kingdoms, save that the little horn acquires three. Thus there will be the revived Roman empire, with distinct kingdoms. The future state will consist of the imperial headship, along with the subordinate kingdoms of the once united western empire. The balance of power will then be required no longer. The day is coming when Satan will deceive the world. God has accomplished His own purpose of gathering out His saints to Himself. And then the world is allowed to have its little moment when Satan has consummated his power on earth. (See verses 12 and 13).

The state here described is perfectly unexampled before or since the fall of the Roman empire. One knows the independence of even the least of the kingdoms. They do not like people to interfere, if they be ever so little. Several too join—some for and some against. Such is the way things have long gone on in the political world of the west.

Here the principle of national independence has disappeared. Separate or party action is all gone. The time is come for a vast change in the world. This will be the character of it: a great imperial power, called the beast, not absorbing but wielding the separate powers of the west. The beast is a type of strength, no doubt, but without reference to God. So it will be then at the close. The Western imperial system will have thrown off all care for God or thought of Him. Apostasy will have prepared the way. This imperial power will have the direction of the western nationalities of Europe. The separate kings will be flattered with the idea that they have each a separate existence and will. But they are only the sinews of the strong man who wields them all. What do they then? “These shall make war with the Lamb.”

What a difference from the blessed reign of peace and righteousness, no less than from what men dream as the gradually coming future! On the other hand, the saints come from heaven, being with the Lamb when the conflict arrives. (Compare Rev. 19:14). Being changed, they are forever with the Lord, and follow Him. So, when the final contest arises between the Lord Jesus and Satan represented by the leader of the west, the Lord is accompanied by His saints. They are here (17:14) styled “called, and chosen and faithful.” Some have thought they must be angels. But they are not, For angels are never called “faithful.” And, again, they are said to be not merely chosen, but “called.” How could an angel be “called” Calling is an appeal of grace, which comes to one who has gone astray in order to bring him back again. But this is never true of an angel. The gospel is God's calling fallen and guilty man to give him, through faith and by means of redemption, a place with Christ in heaven. Those who believe on Him are here shown to be with Him; and they are “called, and chosen and faithful.”

But there is more. What becomes of the woman?

We hear about her too in the 15th verse, and here discern vast religious influence. It is not a national church, but an idolatrous, persecuting, religious system, claiming to be the spouse of Christ, but really an unclean harlot that extends its influence over all the world. It is easily seen what, and what only, such a system can be. There is but one such in Christendom, though she has daughters. Further (as in verse 16), what a change takes place!4 Instead of these horns, or kings of the west, being any longer subjected to Babylon, they turn furiously with the beast against her. Would it not be a very strange thing if the Pope turned against his own church or city? The Pope is not the beast, and has nothing directly to do with Babylon's destruction. It is the symbol of the empire in its last phase, it is the beast from the abyss which joins with the various leaders of the different kingdoms of the west against that ecclesiastical system.

Babylon had long intoxicated man, persecuted saints, and dallied with the kings of the earth. Now the turn of the tide comes: Babylon was not of God, but a corrupt idolatrous imposture. But there is nothing of Christ in her destroyers. It is Satan against Satan. The end of the proud world-church is come, and, soon after, of her destroyers. The beast and the ten horns, throughout the Roman empire, have risen up. The ten

kingdoms of western Europe turn against the Roman harlot, and strip, eat, and burn her.

There are solemn premonitory signs even now. Let me mention only one fact noticed by both Romanists and Protestants. You are aware of the Ecumenical Council lately held in Rome. Its distinctive character is remarkable, and emphatically indicative of the change that has taken place even among the Western powers. For the first time the Pope could not ask one Catholic sovereign to sit in this council. It was composed simply and exclusively of priests. Not a single ambassador or representative of the crowned heads was there. There never was such a state of things before in mediaeval or modern Europe.

I grant you that infidelity lies under the change. It is overflowing even now everywhere, as by and by the beast will be steeped up to the eyes in blasphemy. He and the horns will be given over to the hatred of God, while, at the same time, they hate the harlot which had deceived them so long. It is a violent reaction against the lies of Babylon, but no less a rejection of the truth. You see its spirit in our own country and day. Men take pleasure in spoiling the religious dignitaries and their earthly goods. This is going on in all lands; but the end of it will have a deeper dye.

Let me repeat that I do not mean that we are yet come to the beast or the ten horns of Rev. 17. I am only showing the tendency of the present times—the way in which the wind is blowing in the west. Men prepare to turn violently against what they had been so long enslaved to.

As the end approaches, the word of God asserts its majesty and power, as fresh as at the beginning; for we are verging towards the close of the profession of Christianity on the earth, when the Lord is leading His own to expect their removal to heaven to meet the Bridegroom. We have these admonitory symptoms that the world gets weary of false religion, and becomes ashamed of forms which are themselves superstitions. And no wonder, for there is scarcely an outward ordinance remaining, scarcely even a form, which has not been utterly perverted, as well as the truth itself ignored or denied.

(Concluded from page 224)

W.K.

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Lectures on the Second Coming and Kingdom of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Rapture of the Saints Raised or Changed at Christ's Coming, The

2 Thess. 2:1-12.

Lecture 5.

IT is a matter of thankfulness to God, that the very adversaries of the truth that will be asserted tight are compelled to correct their own theories. The force of that truth is such as cannot be honestly gainsaid. They cannot but acknowledge that the coming of Christ in person is the true hope of the saint. Time was (and most of us who have been at all versed in the spiritual history of God’s testimony during the last quarter of a century or more can well remember) when it was otherwise. All who can carry their eye back over that brief space, or who have had occasion to acquaint themselves with the facts, will know that it was once far different. Even among true children of God the almost universal notion was, that death, in order to the departure of the soul separate from the body to be with Christ, was the hope, and that this was really meant by much of Scripture which spoke of the coming of the Lord. Others, too, were not wanting who indulged in a still lower expectation; and, I am sorry to add, that the faintest of all hopes is far from exploded yet. Are there not Christian men looking for a worldwide triumph of the truth on the earth by missionary effort and the like? Are they not on the rack to imagine such destructive blows to be given the mystery of iniquity by the advancing gospel, and by providential events, as shall establish the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ without let or rival here below?

Nevertheless, even for the measure of homage which has been reluctantly paid to the truth of God, we may be, and perhaps ought to be, thankful. It is the pretty general acknowledgment among believers, that the Lord’s personal coming to receive His saints, then glorified, is the only adequate answer to the Church’s hope. Still, one cannot but feel that it is only a comparative comfort, because of the large admixture of human thoughts and expectations, which goes far practically to nullify that seeming admission of the truth in the hearts of many children of God. For what avails it for the soul’s condition, what for the testimony of God’s truth, if there be the holding of the truth just so far as not to be an infidel to it, while the affections (for there are divine affections for the new life) are not heartily enlisted and in full activity? What can be the result, where the ordinary thought and the habitual teaching tend to turn away the eye from Christ and to fix it upon intermediate events? These events, by which the enemy seeks by all means to distract us from the true star of our hopes, may be either triumph in the world for the truth on the one hand, or sorrow, distress, persecution, terror, produced by Satan’s power among men, on the other. It is difficult to say which has the worst moral effect upon the soul.

My business now will be to prove from the word of God that every theory is false which turns away the heart of the Christian from Christ; that it is a matter of comparatively insignificant moment whether one anticipates a long period of unprecedented prosperity, or whether another looks with dread for a shorter hour of equally awful trouble. In either case it is not the hope Christ has set before the Church, though there is a measure of truth in both. We all believe that there is a long reign of peace and joy for the earth. At least I may assume that all, or almost all here, believe it, as every Christian does who is not corrupted by the rationalism of the day, or by some peculiar fancy prejudicial to the truth. Again, we all believe that there is a day of darkness, of special Satanic power, for the earth. It is not, therefore, that one disputes the fact, either of the brief season of Satan’s rage and man’s trouble here below, or of the long triumphant display of Christ’s power when it shall be established everywhere over the whole world; but what we deny strenuously is, that either one or other is the proper hope which the New Testament puts before the Christian man.

Now, in the goodness of God, We have very full instruction upon the subject, and this remarkably compressed in two epistles, from one of which the introductory portion has been just read. It was remarked on a previous occasion, that the coming of the Lord is no mysterious subject, involved in clouds, beyond the spiritual capacity of even the babe in Christ. The first chapter of 1 Thessalonians disproves it. The Thessalonians were converted, not only from idols “to serve the living and true God,” but “to wait for His Son from heaven.” They were right. The Spirit of God sanctions such waiting — never in a single instance condemns it. The Spirit mentions it to their praise. It was His own power and mighty testimony to the world. Nay more, it is the instinct pertaining to the child of God. There is no Christian that would not ardently await the Son of God from heaven, unless he were turned aside by the false teaching of men. The Thessalonians accordingly were thus expecting the Son from heaven; yet were they ignorant as to the details of the Lord’s coming, and of its relation to other portions of the truth, especially to the prophecies. But it is of immense importance that it should be held distinctly in the soul, that the hope of Christ is no mere prophetic event, does not, properly speaking, belong to prophecy, though, of course, connected with it, but is in itself apart from the revelation of the events that are to take place upon the earth, of which it is the province of prophecy to treat. The hope, on the other hand, is the consummation of the spiritual desires implanted in every Christian’s breast; and therefore one sees at once with what sweetness and propriety our Lord Jesus, who is the object of our faith, is equally that of our hope. It is no mere prospect of getting something, no mere expectation of deliverance from sorrow and trial, or of enjoying circumstances of glory and triumph in the earth.

All these things are beneath the purpose of God for us; founded, no doubt, upon snatches of revealed truth, which, in the enemy’s hand, serve to supplant that which the Lord puts before us, and the Holy Spirit forms in us, and every simple, unspoiled soul necessarily tends to — the desire that Jesus should have His glory, joy, and love, without a check or cloud, for those He loves best — the desire after that precious time when every thought of His heart shall be accomplished in His Bride, as well as for the kingdom here below, to the glory of God the Father. What a change will this be from the circumstances of sorrow, and need, and shame, through which we are passing; though, after all, His love is just as perfect towards us now as it can be then. But He is not content with the present result; He always looks upon us according to that which is given us in purpose, according to the full fruit in glory of His work, His cross, death, and resurrection. Then He will have those He loves together; He will have them near Himself where He is; He will have them in the house of His Father; He will have them above everything that could cause a pang, or be productive of shame to themselves and dishonor upon His name. Surely this is a hope suitable to the heavenly Bride, because it is worthy of Him who died for us and rose again, and is coming back to receive us unto Himself. He is coming, that He may have all that are thus loved, all that are destined according to the will and counsels of God the Father to be with Himself above. And thus it was accordingly that the Thessalonian saints waited and looked, though they little understood the hope, and were not acquainted with the details of prophecy, and had a great deal to be instructed in as to the effects of the coming of the Lord, its bearing both upon the dead and the living (as you may find on the dead saints chiefly in the first epistle, and on the living very particularly in the second). Still were they right in the simple, living, habitual expectancy of their Lord, and thoroughly owned of the Holy Ghost in that attitude of their souls. Of course, this was no more than the general truth. Without enlarging on each passage in these epistles which touches the Lord’s advent, I would particularly notice now what has been just alluded to, their error as to the dead saints. This drew out a remarkable and new revelation of the Holy Ghost through Paul. I say a “revelation,” because he intimates as much himself.

In the earlier chapters there is no such revelation about it, though, of course, it is all the inspired word of God, every whit of it; but in chap. 4 there is a positive communication of fresh light, not before possessed by the Thessalonians, and most needful for the Church at all times. They were so full of the expectation of a returning Savior, that they never so much as contemplated the thought of any from among them dying. They were just then startled by the fact that some brethren did fall asleep. Apparently they were stumbled, and certainly they were yielding to undue sorrow. This might expose them to the tempter. The Holy Ghost, therefore, writes by the apostle to correct the error. They imagined that the dead saints must lose a large part, if not all, of the joy of welcoming the Lord when He comes from heaven. It is not that they so far forgot the truth as to think their companions had by death lost the blessing of eternal life. No persons knowing the gospel as they knew it could harbor such thoughts about believers. If they were sure the Old Testament saints would be saved, they could hardly imagine their own dead brethren who knew and loved the Lord would be lost. But still they thought that there would be a serious drawback from full joy and triumph. They thought that they could not have the sweet privilege of receiving and being received by the Lord at His coming from heaven. On this head they are set right, and with much positive instruction otherwise, in these terms: “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that arc sleeping, that you sorrow not, even as the rest also who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so those put to sleep through Jesus will God bring with him.”

Such is the first main thought here presented, that God will assuredly bring with Jesus those put to sleep by Him. They had doubted this. They had feared it could not be. That in some manner the deceased Christians would be brought into blessing afterward, they of course may have believed; but they never had conceived, as indeed they had not yet been instructed, how dead saints could be with Jesus at His coming. Here the Spirit of God explains how it would all be effected. “For this we say unto you in the word of the Lord, that we, the living, who remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise prevent” (or, I venture to suggest, instead of this, precede) “them which are asleep.” It is well known that this is the true force of the expression. Indeed, “prevent” is merely the old English word; so that it is not a question of a different rendering, but of substituting modern English for that which is somewhat obsolete. Thus, surviving saints on earth are not to be before those who would be then asleep, i.e., dead. “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we, the, King who remains shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” That is, if there be a difference, the dead will rather be before the living, so far from the dead saints missing that joyful hour and its precious accompaniments, and the full enjoyment of the hope for which the saints had been waiting in life. They, though they had passed away from this world, are not viewed as, properly speaking, dead, though of course there was the fact of death; but they are described as those that are fallen asleep, and this by Jesus. The grace of Christ had given death this character in their case. But, moreover, they should be brought with Jesus. How could this be, seeing that they were departed? In order to be brought with Jesus, we are next told that He Himself would descend from heaven with a shout. There is not a word of any saints with Him then. He is alone, as far as His risen people are concerned. He is then coming to raise them. He descends from heaven with shout, and this “shout” has a very special character. It is the word of a commander to his own troop, of an admiral to his own seamen, or, in fact, of any one, who is in a position that gives him authority, to such as belong to him. It is the summons to His own, the arousing word of command, the effect of which is that the dead saints instantly arise from their graves. “Then we, the living who remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall be caught up together with them.” There is nothing like an interval which you can call appreciable, except to faith; because the dead saints raised, and the living ones changed, without passing through death, are “caught up together to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” This, then, accounts for God bringing them all with Jesus. Such is the manner of it. The Lord Jesus having first come,

awakened the sleepers, and changed those alive, translates them both to meet Him in the air. “So shall we ever be with the Lord.” The apostle explains how it comes to pass that, when Christ does come in His glory, and all His saints with Him, the dead shall be there just as much as the living. The reason is that, previously, He comes and raises the dead, changes the living, and has them at the same time caught up to meet Him in the air.

How important and fruitful a Scripture this is, need not be said; yet I would call your attention particularly to a few points. We are told that the dead in Christ rise first; then, not they who may be alive and remain at His coming, but “we.” Why this language, if it was the mind of the Spirit of God to challenge the attitude of the Thessalonian saints — to say that they were excited about the hope, too much occupied with it, improperly looking for it as possible in their own day? Did He tell them they lacked sobriety, because a long period must elapse first, numberless events be fulfilled, visible signs appear; and when they had seen one, two, three or so on of these signs, then they might begin to look out with the intelligent conviction that the coming of the Lord was at length drawing nigh? Had they been in the main mistaken about the matter, could any occasion more demand its correction than this? The Spirit of God was correcting an error of detail; why not deal with it all, root and branch? Why not lay the ax of the word to the root of this tree of human imagination, if such it were? So far from this, the Holy Ghost puts His seal upon the substance of their expectation. They were waiting for Christ to come, and so was Paul; and the apostle, instead of seeking to alter their attitude as an error, puts himself along with the Thessalonian saints in the looking for Christ as a present, continual expectation of the heart. “We which are alive and rain” does suppose the hope from day to day though it does not mean what wicked rationalism imagines, that the apostle Paul gave a date for the Lord’s coming. Scripture never fixes anything of the sort; but what it does, and what the apostle Paul evidently shows here that it does, is to sustain souls in constant hope. It not only sets the saint to wait for Christ, but it keeps him waiting, and condemns every thought inconsistent with waiting for Him. It corrects whatever of error may have encumbered the hope, unsparingly cutting it down; but it confirms the great fundamental truth which the New Testament establishes in the heart of the believer, the continual expectancy of Christ as a present hope. This is not confined to one portion of the word of God. The gospels taught the same; further developments come out in the epistles. Our Lord invariably directed the heart thus even where He was not distinguishing between the expectation of godly persons in Israel and that which gradually dawned when Jewish hopes waned away. He has not forgotten His ancient people, as we saw the other night; He remembers and provides for Israel. He has shown us what their hope is, and has maintained it in the New Testament, lest there might have been the notion that the Old Testament hope was a thing forever gone by, because of the wickedness of Israel. The very New Testament, which shows us the introduction of another building of God, the Church, and the hope that is in its fullness characteristic of the Christian, demonstrates along with it that Israel’s expectations are still kept for them, until they are awakened by the Spirit of God to long for, appropriate, understand, and enjoy them.

In the gospels our Lord presents things at first after a general way. He does not enter with that particularity where He presents His coming, so that you can easily say for whom specially it is. The effect is, in divine wisdom, that while much suits the Christian, there is instruction for the godly Jew of the latter day also. But, at the same time, this one grand feature is found to pervade all our Lord’s instructions on the subject, well worthy of note, that whatever He says, even if it were in a parable, the language is so constructed as to keep him who believes the word of God on the lookout for Jesus. The uniform object, evidently, is to forbid such a thought as a long period elapsing first as a necessary barrier. Take, for instance, in Matt. 24, the household servant, who is put in a position of authority in the absence of his master. Where is there a hint of another servant, and then another succeeding, and another? The very reverse is true: as far as the parable bears upon its face, you could not gather but that the Lord was to come in that very generation. Am I denying then that God foresaw the long time the Church was to abide in this world? Not at all; but this was the sole, or at any rate the chosen method, according to the wisdom of God, in which the saints could be always expecting the Savior. Therefore you cannot draw from these parables, or others kindred to them, the smallest allowance of the thought, that the believer ought not always to expect Jesus during his own lifetime. Such, on the contrary, was in fact the cherished hope of the earliest believers after Christ’s death and resurrection.

Again, in the parable of the virgins, there is the same analogy. As far as the parable states, it is the same virgins who went out first with their lamps, then went to sleep, later on were roused from their sleep by the midnight cry, “Go ye out to meet Him,” and finally went in with Him to the marriage. Of course, the parabolic scope is not limited to the letter, and room is left for continuous application. But there is no ground whatever, on the other hand, for the supposition, that these parables expressly insinuate a long succession of ages and centuries to elapse before Christ could come. But then, while this is true, mark the exceeding perfectness of the word of God. If the Bridegroom should tarry, still the truth rains the same. If the Lord delay what might seem to be a long time in the life of a single virgin or a single servant, or if He in fact (not there stated) spanned over many generations of believers, still the hope remains to burn brightly again. As far as the word of God is concerned, Scripture thus invariably keeps before the believer the Lord as at hand. Therefore every theory is a falsehood which implies that it is wrong to expect Christ habitually, or that there are certain revealed events that must happen first, requiring the lapse of many years, or ages perhaps; that only then, when these events are accomplished, or these ages expired, can we soberly and truly look for Christ to come. Such a theory, I repeat, is contrary to every one of those plain Scriptures, which some inconsiderately allege to prove a necessary delay.

How could the Holy Ghost have written such words, “We which are alive and remain,” if He would have us know that Christ could not come soon? Are we not to gather that He had an object in His phrase? — that, knowing the truth and the future perfectly well, His blessed aim was to settle the believer in the habitual expectation of the Lord Jesus Christ, whatever excuses the unbeliever may make? And so it will be found with the various parts of Scripture that treat of this weighty theme. It is remarkable, (and I would warn you of the fact, having been struck with it only lately in considering the subject,) that the objections usually alleged by those who look for the great tribulation as that which must be gone through by Christians before they are entitled to expect the Lord for their translation to heaven, are precisely the same sort of difficulties as the adversaries of the pre-millennial advent produce against that scheme as a whole. In a word, when men essay to prove that we are not to be expecting Christ’s advent continually, that we are not warranted to look for Him as the proximate hope of the heart, their plea for intervening events assumes pretty much the same shape as that of the men who do not believe He is coming until the thousand years’ reign is over. What are we thence to infer? That both parties are actuated by the self-same spirit of unbelief; that they are the antagonists, I am grieved to say, of the truth of God, as far as this grave subject is concerned.

We may learn much from the first parable we referred to — the household servant. What is the virus of his wrong? What stamped him as “that evil servant”? No doubt his conduct betrays these two fatal blots: he beats his fellow-servants, he eats and drinks with the drunken. There is a haughty self-exaltation towards those put by the Lord on common ground with himself; there is also association and fellowship with the world. But what characterized the laxity and perverseness of his soul? That which was within led to these outbreaks of evil; for never does evil begin in external conduct of any kind. The mischief is always within in the first instance. How, then, does the Lord characterize that inner spring?

He, the Judge of all, knows the principles of the heart. How does He describe this man's inward departure before it is developed in those evil forms of an external kind? "He says in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming." Are there any persons here that say in their hearts, "My Lord delayeth His coming?" There are many that think so everywhere: how many, alas I say so in Christendom. The Lord is not describing the profane world, but those that bear His name: He is in this part portraying the professing system that bears His name. He has done with the Jewish branch of His subject before He presents the parables we have touched on. Within the range of Christendom He gives us, as the first picture of evil, this deep-seated, widespread root of mischief, that certain, professing to be His servants, cherish as the thought of their heart (and there is nothing more fatal), "My Lord delayeth His coming." It is not a merely mistaken notion, it is the heart that is utterly wrong. One might ignorantly admit some perverse doctrine on the subject, and this, of course, would hinder the soul; but here, as in all real mischief, the affections are thoroughly wrong, the judgment is consequently darkened, and the whole moral life becomes the expression of those corrupt affections and that false judgment.

This first picture among the three parables that refer to Christendom is much to be noted. Dark as it is, the Lord Himself is He who draws it for us, under the unfaithful servant saying in his heart, "My Lord delayeth His coming." Various paths may lead a man into such a thought, as the deliberate feeling of his heart: the Lord does not warrant us to ask how it came to pass. If such is the fact, the results are beyond measure fatal. The servant's heart was proved not to wish for his Lord's return. He made up his mind, therefore, that Christ was not coming shortly; he did not love His appearing. Why should he? How could he? He might have been interrupted in some of his plans and projects by His speedy coming. He, therefore, said in his heart, "My Lord delayeth His coming." But it was a false heart, caught by a device of Satan, Morally, it was the forerunner, as far as this parable declares, of the spirit of self and the world coming in to ruin the ministry of Christ, and turn what ought to have been a service into a lordship, making a human "clergy" out of a divine ministry. I wish to hunt nobody's feelings, and beg the forbearance of such as might conceive themselves attacked. Nevertheless, it is due to the word that I should affirm what I believe to be of God from it — that there is a false position in this respect in ominous vicinity to the heart's putting off the coming of the Lord.

Let us look a little more into the parable of the virgins. It has been already cited for a particular purpose. We may now inquire into its general bearing upon the subject. Some there are who apply it to the Jewish remnant; but this is a palpable mistake. There are excellent reasons which forbid its reference in any just sense whatever to them. First, there is no ground in Scripture to believe that, when the Jewish remnant are once called out, they will ever go to sleep before the Lord comes. The circumstances they must encounter would make it a very extraordinary issue if they went asleep; and those who affirm this ought to produce some proof of it. The Jewish remnant go asleep! Men called to face sufficiently imminent danger every day of their lives, until they fled from the sharpest trial since creation! The great crisis of their history may be short; but as long as it lasts, they are nursed in storms and tempest, with death continually before their eyes. Will they then go to sleep during that brief period of at most seven years? Their fiery trial is not to be above half that time; but take the largest possible reckoning in which they can be spoken of. In point of fact, during the first three years and a half, as will be seen more fully on some future occasion, they are not distinguished properly. Morally alone are they a remnant, or in the sight of God; they may not come out distinctly as such before men until the last half week. What can be more opposed to fair inference from every Scripture that speaks of them, than to suppose that such men, at such a crisis, could go asleep? Moreover, take notice that the parable speaks of the whole mass. It is not merely the foolish virgins, but "all" who slumbered and slept.

Now, the remnant, as far as I know, has no false profession in its midst, has nothing answering to wise and foolish — to those who had and those who had not oil. Looking at Christendom, on the other hand, one can see perfectly how this has been verified. And this is not the only reason. Other remarks I may add by the way, though it is a little digression from the subject, that the truth may be cleared, and the distinct force of this parable may be maintained upon the Christian conscience. This must plead as my apology for dwelling on the subject, and rejecting utterly every attempt to turn it away from Christian profession, as its proper object.

The virgins, first of all, went out to meet, the Bridegroom. It is not so with the Jews. They will never go out to meet the Bridegroom. The very principle of their call is rather to stay where they are, and there will the Lord bless them. Even if you consider their fleeing from Antichrist in his time and the unparalleled tribulation, it is not going out to meet the Bridegroom. But what we have in this parable of our Lord is a most instructive picture of the Christian position in relation to the coming of Christ — the virgins going forth to meet the Bridegroom. It is supposed, again, that some are mere professors, for they are without oil in their vessels. This, as remarked, will not be the case with the Jewish remnant. Further, whatever they may possess, Jews can hardly be described in this way as having oil in their vessels. This is really a beautiful emblem of the Christian, characterized by the unction of the Holy Ghost, Though the remnant be under the hand of God's Spirit, this does not answer to having oil in the vessel. The washing of water by the word may be theirs, but not yet the outpoured Spirit.

The more you look at it, proofs will multiply that Christianity was meant by our Lord in this parable.

Thus all go out to meet the Bridegroom. They quit everything here below, not to escape from evil or trouble, but attracted to an object of joy and blessing.

It is the power of Christ and the character of Christianity, from the first moment that the great principle wrought in souls upon earth by the power of the Holy Ghost. In Abraham there was a calling from country and kindred, as far as that was concerned, but no going forth to meet the Bridegroom. In Christianity this received its bright and only real illustration, The Lord, before He went away, put this before the sorrowing disciples: "Ye believe in God: believe also in me." It is as if He had said, I am not going to be the visible Messiah upon earth, as you expect; I am going to be invisible, even as God is; I am about to disappear from the world. But if I go away, my heart and thoughts are with you. In my Father's house, whither I go, I am about to bless you even more than if I stayed here. If I do not set up my earthly kingdom according to the prophets, I am going to what is far better — to the Father's house; and if I go and prepare a place for you (for this was one object of His going, as He states it here), "I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."

In this you have exactly the Christian hope. It is the Lord Jesus leaving this world for heaven, giving them the certainty that He associates them with Himself in His heavenly place, and, moreover, that, when the place is ready for them there, He will come again for them. John 13 shows, that, all the time He is in heaven, He is preparing them for the place; chap. 14 shows that He is preparing the place for them that done, He will come again and receive them to Himself, that where He is, they may be also.

Far from there being anything Jewish in this, it is, on the contrary, the contrast to everything of the sort. It is the proper Christian hope; for the Lord comes, and this, not to bless us in our place by putting down evil, and making this world a sweet and precious abode, where the

fragrance of His goodness, power, and glory will be shed universally. This is the Jewish expectation, which the holy prophets continually present. But here it is quite new and heavenly, the Father's house, and a place for them as much as for Him there. Who had ever heard such a thing before? When, where, had there been the most distant hint? Now the Lord divulges it. It is not, of course, that the mystery hid from ages and generations was yet brought out; but He did announce the proper Christian hope, which they would understand better when the Holy Ghost was come. And so they did.

Then, in the Acts of the Apostles, the general thought is set before the disciples in their approaching testimony to their Master unto the ends of the earth. "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." I admit that it takes in the establishment of Christ's power and kingdom here below; but it is only the broad truth for which I now quote it. Still, it is at bottom substantially the same thing. The disciples were to look for Jesus from heaven. It is not great doings here below; but the Christian, associated with Christ in the testimony of His grace now, is to look for Him coming from heaven. This, you see, connects itself with the virgins going out to meet the Bridegroom. The New Testament, as a whole, enlarges and illustrates this most precious thought. It is not so much the blessing of men upon the earth, nor the reduction of the power of Satan here below in binding him and putting him aside from the earth, as the taking away of the believer out of the world to be with Christ in the Father's house. Only in the epistles of Paul this becomes still more evident. Now this is what we have to seize. Faith goes out to meet the Bridegroom, before He really comes and accomplishes the desire of the heart. Such is the character of the call of these virgins. It is not abiding where they are, to be blessed on the earth; but going forth to meet the Bridegroom. It is, in principle, going forth unto Christ without the camp, as in Heb. 13, to be blessed with Him in the heavens, as it is to share the reproach of the cross in this world. So we find every provision for sustaining in them this hope. They had not only the lamp of testimony, but the oil of the Holy Ghost, to keep up the light burning brightly in a way which, I believe, is characteristic of the Christian.

Spite of all, however, they go asleep. The Bridegroom tarries; the Christian, true as well as false, forgets his hope; but the mighty grace of God makes the solemn cry heard at midnight, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!" We are not told who is the instrument. Enough for us to know that the cry was to be, and that the effect would be believers abandoning whatever had detained them before, and going forth once more to meet the Bridegroom. It is the resumption of the original attitude of the Christian in this respect. The true hope of the Church stirs the long sleeping disciples. The Christian hope is revived in the saints. The Spirit of God skews that His power would not permit such a hope to expire finally in the Church. At an undated time is the cry heard once more.

The cry at midnight, I believe it to be of the most solemn importance. Just before the Lord Jesus Christ was to return, there is the cry heard, and not till then. The virgins, even the foolish as well as the wise, aroused by the cry, trim their lamps; but only they that have the oil in their vessels are in a condition to be received. The others are occupied by their wants, seeking here and there to find that oil which they have not. The Lord comes at the critical moment, and the wise virgins alone go in to the marriage.

Mark another thing. They went forth again to meet the Bridegroom. The Christians at this time, and at this time only, since their early turning aside to slumber, return to their original position of going out to meet the Bridegroom. They leave all for Christ once more. Have you done it? Can you say that you have gone out to meet the Bridegroom? Are you detained by old habits? Are you kept back by the traditions of men? Have you got so accustomed as to like the state of decadence into which Christendom has fallen? Do you prefer to sleep at leisure? or are you roused at the cry that grace has sent forth again? Have you gone forth to meet the Bridegroom? If so, happy are you! If with the oil in your vessels, the consciousness of your relationship, the enjoyment by the Holy Ghost's power of that which you are called to, you can stay and sleep where you are, be it so: for my part, it seems wiser and truer, not to say due to Christ and His love, to go forth with alacrity of heart, and await His coming in peace.

The next parable does not call for many words just now. Without repeating the common truth, it may be remarked, that here we have a vivid account of that which pertains to Christianity on the active side. When Christ ascended up on high, He gave gifts unto men. Never was, and, I believe, never will be seen, the same fullness of blessing of this kind as is known in Christianity. There will be a brief, wide, energetic testimony everywhere at "the time of the end," no doubt; but still, this trading with the various talents which the Lord gives — to one this, and to another that — is characteristic evidently of the Christian ministry. Accordingly, you have the servants found in the active use of these different gifts of the Lord's grace, who calls them to render Him an account, at last, how they were used. Still, throughout, whether it were household servants, whether virgins, whether men trading with talents, there is this one stamp imprinted on these as on all other parables that bear upon Christendom. There is no revelation of such a delay as necessarily implies a succession of servants from age to age, no disclosure of the almost double millennium of Christendom which has transpired in point of fact. Just so far is a delay spoken of as might give occasion to the progress of permitted evil in Christendom. And is it not remarkable, that the apostolic hour does not close till the last survivor of that holy company could affirm that the worst character of evil was there already, whereby it was known to be the last time? (1 John 2.) Take any other prediction you please, as, for instance, 2 Tim. 3: "In the last days perilous times shall come." What does the Spirit of God expressly add? That these times were a long way off? On the very contrary, He enjoins, "From such turn away." Something of it, at least, was there then. There is no delay. Then, again, take worse than that — the mystery of iniquity. It "already worketh." Where was the delay? Take even antichrists, the worst form of evil that can possibly be save one, the last of themselves: "Many antichrists are already come." Thereby, the apostle knew it was "the last time." What evils more were to be dreaded? What was there to be waited for?

Christ! No events, therefore, are so interposed by revelation as to be a barrier to the return of the Lord in the hearts of the saints. He might delay, in fact; and no doubt these evils, which already wrought, would consequently expand, and become much more definite and appalling. The lapse of time, if God so pleased it; would make their character more and more plain. Most true was His description of these deep and various evils; but the evils were there and then detected, pronounced upon, and judged from the very first age of Christendom. Therefore, the expectation of such evils could not rightly act as an obstacle. They were already treated as in existence; they are so described by the Spirit of God. Nothing, then, can justly detain the heart; for what, according to the word, ought to hinder one from always expecting Christ?

But then it is asked, are not particular cases adverse? Do we not find the Lord telling Peter by what death he must glorify God? Do we not hear Paul telling us that the time of his departure was just at hand? In truth, such objections refute themselves. It proves the very contrary of that for which they are summoned. Would it not sound a very extraordinary thing among men for any man to be seriously told that he must die some time or another? Ordinarily, people have made up their minds for it as a certainty; they are satisfied that all must die. How comes it to pass in Scripture, that a man who was carrying his life in his hand, like the apostle Paul, needed to have an intimation that his death was nigh at hand? How comes it that so bold a servant of God as Peter, in the midst of hostile Jews, whom lie denounced as murderers of their own Messiah, had to be told of the death whereby he was to glorify God? Because at that time the children of God, expected not death, but Christ

to come in glory. Because their Lord's return from heaven was strongly and universally watched for by every saint of God. So truly was it the sanctioned settled hope of all, that the exception had to be a matter of positive special intimation from God. Again, mark the manner in which these intimations are given. There is little reason to suppose that Peter comprehended the meaning of that to him when heard; as the disciples, we know, misunderstood in general the Lord's word to John. It was put in a most enigmatical form, just as John's tarrying was cast in such a figurative mold that the disciples themselves discussed with perplexity what was meant. They conceived that John was not to die. "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" Thence they drew the inference that John was not to taste death. They were wrong there: did they know the other so much better?

Observe this also, that the Spirit of God in the word never notices Peter's death, so that the Church could know anything about it, till he was just on the point of departure: then Peter says the Lord had told him that he must "put off this tabernacle." Was this to make a sign of it, or to help on the systematic deferring of the hope? Besides, Peter might have died any day. Though he was not a young man when the first epistle appeared, yet the Spirit of God kept him from writing about it then. Nowhere else does he refer to it till he was just going to depart. The Church's hope could not therefore be affected by it, for the mention was made only as he was leaving the earth; and the gospel of John did not appear for long after. Just so was it with the apostle Paul. He names something similar, but when? He was not even aware that he was going to die when he wrote his epistle to the Philippians; or rather, he was sure he was to live a little longer, though stating it in one of the last of his writings. It was only at the end of all, when he was on the point of being offered up, that he declared his departure was at hand. What sort of proof is this that there are intervening events revealed in God's word which ought to hinder a Christian from continually watching for Christ? It is really strong presumption in a direction exactly the reverse.

So everything that is hastily caught at to prove that our Lord delays His corning, when duly examined and understood, will be found to fall in with His own condemnation of that sentiment, and the general strain of the Spirit's testimony to the clean contrary. Have we not all experienced man's unbelief to be so blind that the very reason produced for rejecting the truth is, when viewed in the light of God, the weightiest ground for receiving it? Take, for instance, rationalistic attacks upon Scripture, and especially their efforts to lower the gospels. What is the fact? The discrepancies in the gospels demonstrate, not only the veracity of the writers, but the beauty and perfection of the truth. Even a simple Christian man, it is to be hoped, speaks conscientiously the truth. Such assailants never knew or practically forgot that God wrote the gospels. They are under the illusion that it was but Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John who did the work; whereas, employing whom He pleased, it was God who wrote them. This truth the Christian accepts without controversy, and would never dream of questioning, unless beguiled from his simplicity by the spurious theories of men who know not the Scriptures nor the power of God, however conversant they may be with the externals and accessories of the Bible. The alleged discrepancies are not in the smallest degree due to human infirmity; they lie not so much on the surface as in the depths of divine purpose, as the fullness of Jesus is variously viewed and depicted. No one evangelist could suffice. Hence to each it was given by the Spirit of God to bring out the glory of Christ, as it pleased Him, though suitably, no doubt, to the vessel employed. Thus the points of difference in the scope, manner, and expressions necessarily spring from this rich and varied exposition of the truth as it is in Jesus. The simple Christian receives it all, and enjoys it; but the more the truth is sifted and appreciated, the more triumphantly it is vindicated. This, of course, supposes not only faith, but a certain spiritual intelligence which you must never look for in the self-complacent rejecter of revelation. The intelligence of faith turns the objections into deepening proofs of the divine value of God's word.

No otherwise is it with the objections that are often brought against the constant hope of the Lord's coming to meet the saints. They, when dispassionately and intelligently looked into, turn out to be proofs that God so wrote the New Testament, by the evangelists, as they are called, and by the apostles, as to keep the soul in its first bright impression expecting Christ from day to day. There is no such idea as fixing a special time, whether you put it at one epoch or another. The whole system of measured dates or equivalent signs to decide about the coming of the Lord is false. Some have pointed to A.D. 1867. Then, when we approach the year, they begin to shift the time somewhat farther off, and say that it is but "the beginning of the end." What is this but saving their own credit at the expense of Scripture? To sober, not to say reverent, men, it looks like unworthy dealing with the word of God; and the source of the error, I am not afraid to tell them, is ignorance of the word of God, and especially of the Church's calling and hopes.

The word of God is pure, being the reflection of His truth and holiness. There is no such thing as seeking to make an impression upon the spirit of the believer for the sake of effect. God Himself has purposely put the Christian and the Church to wait for Christ without knowing the time, inasmuch as He reserves all such matters in His own authority, as indeed is most due and wise withal In His grace there is a reason given, which is that "the long-suffering of the Lord is salvation." Such is the true key to the delay. God is not closing up the number of the elect before the time. He will not shut into narrow limits the rich grace which has gone out so far and so actively, and already called in not a few. God is magnifying His Son. He is slow, therefore, so to speak, to foreclose the period. He is widening it rather, as it were: He enlarges less for greater bounds. He has allowed a time to pass, no doubt, which would have surprised the early Christians; but when you examine the word of God, there is not a trace of a thought which fixes or limits the time They were always expecting Him, but at the same time without knowing when He might come. And what is the cause of this? Why is there the absence of a date? The Lord was continually presented as coming quickly, at hand, &c., and it was His will that the Christian should be always looking for Him.

Let us turn to the portion of the word of God read to you tonight. This Scripture has been made to teach a palpable error, through an unfortunate misconception on the part of our admirable translators. Nor were they singular; for the same thing pervaded almost every version in this particular until a recent date. It is no wonder that, thus prevalent, this mistake has been so largely the means of misguiding or perplexing the believer. Some here might be astonished to hear that there are those who consider that 2 Thessalonians was written to correct an error into which the saints addressed had fallen through misinterpreting its predecessor. The first epistle is supposed to have produced the hasty and erroneous expectation that our Lord was at hand. The second epistle is supposed by these to have been written and sent to correct this, to reprove them for their feverish state, and to declare that the Lord was not at hand, as the enthusiasts imagined. This explanation I denounce as contrary to the word of God. One proof that it is false and unsound lies in this, that it sets Scripture against Scripture. The truth always harmonizes. The moment fresh light is seen, it removes that darkness which made one part of the word of God inconsistent with another; and there is no more common or surer evidence, that the soul has been led, by influx of light from above, into acquaintance with the mind of God, as revealed on any given matter, than this power which puts facts previously disjointed in texts of Scripture into order and clearness as a living whole.

What the apostle is really correcting by the second epistle is an error wholly different from that which is attributed to these saints, or those who had led them astray. He had comforted them about the dead saints in the first; he now seeks to dispel their alarm about the day of the Lord on themselves, the living saints. You must remember that the Thessalonians already knew that the Lord was coming, as they also knew that the day of the Lord would be a day of trouble and darkness; so that “when men would say, Peace and safety, sudden destruction would fall upon them.” But how these things were to be put together, they did not know: such indeed is the condition in which a great many Christians are at this moment. They did not understand the relative order of the Lord’s coming and of His day. The consequence was, that, in the case of the Thessalonians, false teachers took advantage of their ignorance to trouble them. It is important to observe, that alarming the saints of God, filling them with anxiety touching God and their own relation to Him, and holding out a disturbing, painful impression of that which He is going to do with respect to them, is one of the plainest tokens of the devil’s work. To arouse unconverted souls, ay, and to alarm them too, may be all quite right; but when a soul has found Christ, and is supposed to be resting upon “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” to overwhelm it with terror or even doubt as to its association with Christ through prophetic events, is the antagonistic work of the enemy. I am not now speaking of the case of a person falling, alas! into sin. It is quite right to rouse the conscience in such circumstances, and to bring the person to confess his sin; but I allude now to producing alarm in the saints of God, and this through some misused picture of the day of the Lord. It is to falsify in the most intimate relations to Christ; it is to turn the fullness of grace into a source of terror which is most ruinous. This was precisely what these false teachers essayed to do: thus too others have wrought since. They presented the “day” of the Lord before these believers as a present thing, substituting its horrors for the coming of the Lord with its eternal joy and blessedness.

It is carefully to be observed that “the day of the Lord” and “the coming of the Lord” are never founded in the word of God. What is the difference? The “coming” of the Lord is the general term. It means His presence, in contrast with His absence. That is the literal force of the word, which is, I dare say, fairly enough translated “coming,” because He must have come in order to be present; but it is His state of presence which is the true and genuine force of the word. Now, it is evident that our Lord might change His absence for His presence without manifesting Himself. Hence, you have this difference — that Scripture speaks not only of the general truth of the presence of Christ by and by, as that which is to be, instead of His being absent as He is now; but it defines a particular part of that presence, which is variously styled, His “day,” His “revelation,” His “appearing,” or “the manifestation (epiphany or shining forth) of His presence.” I am now referring to many Scriptures which anyone who is familiar with the word of God will easily enough bear in mind and apply. The great distinctive point is, that, while the “presence” or the “coming” of the Lord is necessary to all these things, still all these other terms imply notions over and above the thought of His presence. His “presence” is the larger term and leaves room for His coming before the “day,” i.e., before He appears, reveals, or manifests Himself.

Is this to draw upon imagination? It is to assert very needed and important truth from Scripture. Take this example in Col. 3, “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear” (or be manifested), “then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.” Now, there we have, as distinctly as God could put it, the fact of the joint manifestation of Christ and us in glory. It is not that, when our Lord appears, then shall we be caught up to be with Him; for this is false. There is no such idea anywhere taught in the word of God. Where is the least hint that the world and the Church shall behold Christ at the same time? that the first moment of seeing Christ will be the same for an unbeliever as for the believer? The very reverse is true. For the Scripture before us declares that, “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear” (or be manifested) “shall ye also appear with Him in glory.” This means, not that we abide upon the earth till He appears to all, and that we are only caught up when He thus appears, but that when He makes Himself visible from the heavens to the earth, then we, too, shall be seen along with Him in glory. We must, therefore, have been caught up to Him before. This exactly falls in with the first Epistle, chap. 4, as has been shown. There, it is said, “Those that sleep by Jesus will God bring with Him.” The Lord will descend from heaven “with a shout” — such a shout as suits Christ, if He only intended His voice to be for His own. This seems the reason why the apostle singled out a special word. “Shout” () is a term implying the relationship that exists between the Lord and His Own followers, like that of soldiers summoned by their general, or seamen by their commander. If nothing more were meant than the loud expression of His voice for all the world as much as for His own people, we might naturally infer this peculiar word would not be used. Whereas the word conveys the thought of a shout from me who commands to those who are commanded; and, therefore, it is mere and ignorant unbelief to press the fact that the Lord so shouts, and then to conclude that all the world must hear Him at that epoch. It is contrary to every analogy, that the world will be witnesses of the Lord’s coming to take away the believers. It is easy to conceive that the Lord could conceal it if He pleased. Of course the world may be alarmed and astonished for a while by the fact of the disappearance of so many. That there will be a great effect produced in the world by it, I am not in the least disposed to deny; but I believe that the simple and natural interpretation of the terms employed in this Scripture supposes a special connection between the Lord and those for whom He comes, and that the choice of the expressions limits His action in sight and sound too, as well as in effects of deeper moment, to those whom it all concerns. No more at present would I deduce or assert.

But the false teachers, who found the Thessalonians so bright and happy in their hope (particularly now as their anxiety about the dead had been dispelled by the first epistle), began to alarm them by their doctrine about the day of the Lord. “Oh,” they may have said, “see these troubles come upon the Church now; see the havoc that has been made; see all those disasters which are rife in the world.” It would seem, from the first epistle, there was a great deal of persecution at that time; and the opening of the second epistle confirms this. We find that there is much allusion to those who harass believers. We learn from the Old Testament that the day of the Lord is characterized by darkness, trouble, and anxiety — a day of clouds and darkness. These false teachers consequently said, “The day of the Lord is come” (not coming). This is the error that the apostle is combating. Is it a rendering confined to a few individuals? I remember the time when it might be doubted very much if there were six men in England that accepted it. I doubt very much whether there are six men in England, who, hang weighed the subject with due care, would care to dispute this now. They would not agree with all that I have drawn from the passage; but it is remarkable how God has vindicated the truth of this very Scripture, even now, by those who have no particular theory whatever about it. Nevertheless, they contend for this view of ,1 in 2 Thess. 2:2, as a matter of plain and fair interpretation of the words of the Holy Ghost. I question if any able man, competent to pronounce upon such a matter, unless previously and much biased, would any longer argue that the English version is correct in its representation of the last word of the second, verse. Every intelligent person, who is not under strong prejudice, will readily own the passage means that the day of the Lord is (not “at hand,” but) actually arrived. This was the error which the apostle sets himself against. The false teachers said, “The day of the Lord is there.” The apostle proves, on the contrary, that it cannot be present before certain facts which did not yet appear.

First let me state the circumstances of the case. The same word, translated “at hand” in our version here, occurs in some six or seven other places. It appears in Romans 8:38, but there it is “things present.” In 1 Corinthians 3:22, it is just the same, “things present.” In 1 Corinthians 7:26, it stands, “present distress.” So again in Hebrews 9:9, it is translated, “for the present time.” Again, in 2 Timothy 3:1, it

has a different form — “perilous times shall come,” but it is not “shall be at hand,” which would give a totally unwarranted sense, or rather no sense at all. I have no hesitation in saying, therefore, that there can be no legitimate doubt that the true meaning of the word everywhere is “present,” and that here it means “the day of the Lord is present.” What confirms this is, that the apostle elsewhere insists that “the day is at hand.” (Rom. 13) What day? The day of the Lord, of course. Did he then teach afterward what he denounced in the misleaders of the Thessalonians? This is what the false version does; it puts the apostle in opposition to himself, and it makes him take up the error of those Judaizing teachers. In truth, he does nothing of the kind. He denies in 2 Thessalonians 2 That the day of the Lord was come. He declares in Romans 13 that it is at hand. That day meant the day of fearful judgment, even the execution of God’s wrath upon earth; and this he denies to have arrived, contrary to those who troubled the Thessalonians.

The error he proceeds to meet by two considerations. First of all, he presses a motive for the heart; and, secondly, he reasons from the positive facts of the case. The motive was this: “We beseech you, brethren, by2 the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter.” They pretended in various ways that they had a revelation for it. They even alleged Paul himself as the author of their error. He utterly denies it. It is no question at all of the former epistle. He does not say, “by the letter from us,” but “by letter as from us.” It was a pretended letter from the apostle, teaching their false thought; not the real epistle, which teaches nothing but the truth. The suppositious letter contained the error that the day of judgment was actually there (and not at hand merely). It was a forged letter, and a false doctrine. “Don’t you know,” he intimates, “that the Lord is coming and is to gather you all to Himself?” Such is the motive by which he anneals to the heart: it is the means by which he rouses their spiritual feelings against the cheat. When the Lord does come, the first thing He will do is to gather those He loves to Himself.

But there is another ground of argument that he takes. He reasons upon the matter of fact, and demonstrates that the day of the Lord cannot come except there be the apostacy first, “and the man of sin be revealed” — the lawless one who shall exalt himself in opposition to God. When this display of lawlessness on the earth is full (the man of sin, as being evidently the expression of human evil; the one who sits in the temple of God, as the height of Jewish pride and antagonism against God; and, beside all this, he that sets himself up against all that is called God, or object of veneration, which comprehends God’s government in the world), then the day of the Lord3 may, not to say must, come. Everything of God connected with the Gentiles is thus gainsaid; all the testimony to God in Israel is set at naught and defied; the final issue of the apostacy in Christendom is there. The man of sin confronts as it were the Man of righteousness, who thereon bursts in upon the guilty scene, consuming with the breath of His mouth, and destroying by the appearing of His coming. For all is out that demands divine judgment — human evil, Jewish evil, Gentile evil, and the evil of Christendom, the culmination and concentration of the whole being this personage whose coming is after the working of Satan in every kind of power, and signs, and wonders of falsehood. I verily believe in the full force of the word. Whatever may be the form of evil by the way, there will be this person at length manifested as the antagonist of the Lord Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, the Lord over all peoples, and nations, and tongues, the Head of the Church, and, more than all, the true God and eternal life. Then will come to pass Satan’s long-planned effort and display on earth against the God of heaven, who will come in avenging glory in the person of Jesus, as once He appeared in the grace that brings salvation. Can the issue be doubtful? The lawless one (for such is the meaning of his title and character) is in a moment hurled to destruction, being cast alive into the lake of fire.

Thus the apostle, by a twofold process, positive and negative, puts all end to the delusion whereby false teachers harassed the Thessalonian saints. Christ must first come and gather His own to be with Himself safe and sound. Then again the development of man’s and Satan’s evil combined must be full before the world can be judged. In the dealings of God it is ever so. He would not allow even Sodom and Gomorrah to be destroyed till their iniquity was proved to be intolerable beyond possibility of doubt.

He would not command the Amorites to be smitten before their cup was full. So it will be in the end of this age. When patience is exhausted and the worst corruptions of the best blessings are manifest, then the Lord will arise in His power and put down all His foes forever.

Thus, the passage closely bears upon our present subject, and, when rightly rendered and applied, strengthens, instead of weakening, the Christian’s constant expectation of Christ. And one error leads to another; for those who have translated wrongly have also fallen into the mistake of confounding the coming of the Lord with His day. Now the coming , no doubt, embraces the day of the Lord as one of its parts, yet is only a part of it. Accordingly the coming of the Lord directly involves the dealings of grace with the saints, such as their gathering to Christ or translation to heaven; the day of the Lord never does. Grace is in no way the aim or character of the day of the Lord. It will be their manifestation in glory, if you will It will be the righteous adjudication of that which is now a scene of weakness, perplexity, sorrow, sin. It will be not only the putting down of the world’s pride, but the Lord will also then assign to His servants, to each man according to his own labor, or, according to the style of the parable, He will give to one five cities, and to another ten. Thus, I do not in the least deny that we are to have the reward of the inheritance in that day, even as the world will then be judged of the Lord. But, with equal assurance, I must affirm that Scripture never represents the coming of the Lord for us as an object only to be expected after certain events have transpired. Thus, we have two series of facts in Scripture the coming of the Lord, which is always set forth without dates; and the day of the Lord, which requires some momentous events to be accomplished first, and therefore implies dates more or less. How are we to judge? There is nothing simpler. Admit both; allow each its own proper sphere without confounding them; and all becomes easy and plain. The coming of the Lord, in its bearing upon the Christian, is our hope — the hope of the personal presence of Jesus to take His saints out of this world, and translate them to the Father’s house. Never, in any passage of the word of God, is a single incident put before it as necessary to be accomplished before the Church can legitimately look for Him. The alleged cases of Paul and Peter are just the exceptions which prove the rule; the Christian and the Church even then looked, not for death, but for the coming of the Lord. They were right. The one unvaried object of the Savior first, and of the Holy Ghost afterward working by the apostle, is to keep the hope of His coming as the immediate prospect before the saints. I use the word “immediate;” for the practical aim was that, when the Lord knocked, the saints should open to Him immediately. It is merely a question of His presence, and their instant reception of Him, according to the figure employed.

Lastly, when we come to the final book of the New Testament, surely here, if anywhere, we might expect the detailed mention of preparatory events to usher in the coming of Christ, if such circumstances were revealed as necessary to precede it. It is the great book that predicts the closing scenes of man’s day, and the judgment of the Lord. If these last revelations were meant to hinder the looking for Christ as a present continual hope; if I ought to wait till all the seals were opened, all the trumpets blown, and all the vials poured out, and then, not before, really to expect Christ, here was the occasion to correct any unseasonable enthusiasm. I might get into all sorts of confusion as to where I am in the book, or what seal, trumpet, or vial I am under. Who may not lose himself in such a laborious investigation? Where do you find two men of independent judgment agreed on these points? Any two of the firmest and fastest disciples of the historical school would be found to differ

considerably, each from his neighbor. Scripture is plain that the disciples were set to wait for the Lord, and that the Holy Ghost confirms it: can they believe that the book of Revelation was meant to come in and swamp their whole hope? Are we to say to you that have been looking for the Lord, all this is to happen as a prelude, and you must gaze on the changes in the world till all the predicted preliminaries have been accomplished, and then you may begin to look for Christ shortly? Is not this what the confusion of unbelief does?

But are we, on the other hand, to thrust aside the book of Revelation? Assuredly not. But still we assert again, that the hope of the Christian is distinct from any dependence on the accomplishment of intervening events. It is a question of the Father scuffing the Son in His grace to receive us, and therefore kept hi the word of God entirely apart from the evolution of earthly affairs. Will any contend that there is the smallest contradiction in God's revelations? There is none whatever. We find in the beginning of the Apocalypse the seven churches mentioned, and thenceforward no more about them till we come to the closing chapter, when a message is sent again to the churches. After the "things that are" (or the time-states of the Church) are done with, heaven is opened, and soon the prophet sees there a new class described very completely. They are seated upon thrones; they are clothed in white; they have crowns on their heads. They enter into God's character with the utmost intimacy of knowledge, and answer to the glory of God in every point. Who then can these be? Who are these four and twenty elders? They were never heard of before in heaven, as far as we can gather from Scripture. We have many visions of heaven in the Old Testament, and more or less distinct. We have also striking glimpses into heaven in the New Testament. But here, for the first time in the word of God, we hear of a number of persons who clearly are redeemed men in heaven. For, allow me to say, these were not spirits.

The description differs from that of separate spirits, which are nowhere said, as such, to sit on thrones, and are never represented acting above, as these are said to do.

Is it asked respecting these redeemed persons that are crowned, enthroned, and exercising a kind of royal priesthood in the presence of God, Who are they? The message to the seven Churches told us, that those who overcame would be blessed of the Lord with Himself above. We need not now enter into the particulars of the promises. Have we not here that which, as far as it goes, makes good what the Lord puts before us? No doubt much remains to be fulfilled; but still, how much will then have been done for the dwellers in heaven! But, moreover, we have these elders represented as four and twenty. What is the meaning of the symbol? Clearly, it seems to me, that they are the heads of the royal priesthood. When David and Solomon arranged the priestly race of Aaron, they were arranged in twenty-four courses. Accordingly there need not be a doubt that the twenty-four elders are a symbol that alludes to these classes of priesthood. Why in twenty-four classes? Why not in one, or in twenty? The four and twenty appear, I apprehend, because the saints glorified above are viewed as heads of the priesthood. The central part of the book of Revelation shows that there will be saints on earth during the great crisis. Yet after this, as before, the four and twenty elders are seen in heaven, neither more nor less.

Clearly, therefore, you have to account for these two facts — the absence of the Church upon the earth after Revelation 3, and the presence of the elders in heaven from Revelation 4. Is it possible to avoid the conclusion, that the true members of the Church of God are in the interval between these two chapters removed out of the world, and taken to heaven, and seen there under the symbolic twenty-four elders? And they are complete, which can only be after the Lord has gathered the saints to Himself above. Before that, some of the heavenly saints being above and some below, there would be no propriety in the use of a symbol which requires all to be included.

It was not fitting or required to give the description of our Lord's coming to remove them to Himself in the Apocalypse. Let it be remarked, that, no matter what the scheme of prophecy be, nor what view is entertained of the Revelation, there is no vision given in the Revelation of the Lord's coming to take the saints above. If, you make the Lord delay the removal of the saints till chapter 19, no account is there found of His coming to receive the saints for heaven, any more than there is in chapter 3,4. Observe, too, that if you suppose the rapture delayed till chapter 19, you do not account for the vision of the four and twenty elders all through. If you say that it is that part of the Church which is gone to heaven now, I am obliged to reject the idea, and for this reason, that a part does not meet the symbol of the twenty-four elders. They are the heads of the complete courses. But you can never have the heavenly priesthood completed in its heads till those sleeping are raised, those alive are caught up, and all translated to the Lord at His coming. It is only thus and then that there is the required completeness; and, therefore, it follows that, if the twenty-four elders be the heads of the heavenly priesthood, and if the Church, now on earth, and then caught up, answer to them, the Lord must have come between those two before-named points to receive the saints to Himself. I apprehend that the reason why the Lord's coming to translate His own to Himself is nowhere described in this book, is grounded upon the principle, that the Revelation is occupied with judgments rather than with a display of grace. The fact is there made most evident, that the heavenly ones are somehow gone on high; but the Lord's presence and their gathering together to Him above would not fall in with the general character of that book. While they are in heaven, the providential judgments under the seals, trumpets, and vials run out their appointed course here below; but the elders are in their places during the shifting scenes, and never leave heaven; neither do we ever trace the least addition to their number. The emblem was complete from their first appearance in Revelation 4. Does not this entirely fall in with the truth that I have endeavored to present this night? The Lord keeps His coming to receive His saints as a distinct hope of the heart, apart from earthly events.

When they are, at His coming, translated to heaven, then the earthly tide of events begins to flow.

Hence, another stage of Christ's coming is called "the appearing," "the revelation of Christ," and the other terms which imply manifestation — among the rest, "the day of the Lord." Where do you find the counterpart of this in the Apocalypse? It is given in chapter 19, where we see the heavens open, and the Lora coming in judgment. The Lord is described as the Word of God emblematically riding on the white horse; it is the image of aggressive action, of a prosperous conquest over His foes. Such is very simply the meaning. I am not advocating a mere literal way of interpreting the Revelation, which is a capital blunder; for it is allowed to be a symbolical book. Here then we have the Lord represented as coming from heaven. But does He come alone? The heavens that let out the Lord are also seen to let out the saints, the hosts that are in heaven, who follow Him upon horses, robed in fine linen white and clean. "Who are they, and whence came they?" They are saints, and they come out of heaven. Of what is their garb, white linen, the symbol? The righteousness's of saints. They are not angels then. This is entirely corroborated by a previous intimation in Revelation 17:14, which announces the Lord's coming from heaven for the judgment of the world, where the beast and the kings were seen joined together against Him. It was said that they should "make war with the lamb, but the Lamb should overcome them." But who were the parties? "The faithful, and called, and chosen."

This is not a description possible, as a whole, to be applied to angels, but only to saints; for we never hear of angels described as "faithful;" still less could they be described as "called." The call of God could not be predicated of an angel, though, of course, he might well be said to be "chosen." There are elect angels, but they are never said to be called. For calling implies grace entering the world and separating unto

God, bringing out of the condition in which people were. This could not be applied to an angel, for an angel abides in his antecedent state, save the fallen ones; but a poor sinner is justly said to be called, who is made by grace a, saint of God through faith in Christ. Therefore, I have no hesitation in affirming from these inspired statements that we have come to the second act, so to speak, in which the Lord manifests His presence, He appears from heaven, and the saints, already risen and changed, already taken up to be above, come along with Him heaven. It is between. His coming for the saints and His coming with them from heaven, that the earthly events transpire, with various signs and of His coming to receive the saints, but of His coming to judge the world. In short, there are no defined periods or visible harbingers to intimate that He is coming to receive us, but there are manifold and manifest signs before He comes with the saints in the execution of His judgment upon the world.

Some perhaps may inquire how this change comes to pass; and what is the moral meaning of these signs being withheld now and shown afterward. The answer is simple, and, I believe, certain, from the word of God. It is in that precise interval that God will begin to work for and in His earthly people. It is during that very season that the Jews will be touched by God’s Spirit, and their hearts turned towards their long-despised Savior. Objects of mercy as the remnant may be, the nation will have to pass retributively through an hour of fearful trial, danger, and desolation; but they will be wrought upon, and so prepared, that, even before the Savior does appear, their hearts will welcome Him in the name of Jehovah. They will be the nucleus of His earthly people round their Messiah. They will not, of course, come from heaven, as do the risen and glorified saints with Him; but He comes to take the earth as well as heaven (Rev. 20), though He does not mingle these risen saints, or others who will then be raised, with those who yet abide in their natural bodies upon the earth for the millennial reign. Blessed association there will be, but no confusion of earthly and heavenly.

But I do not enlarge upon the subject tonight, partly because the hour admonishes me that I have already spoken at length, and partly because details will come more properly before us tomorrow evening, if God will, when we shall see what light is afforded as to the great tribulation that is coming upon the earth, and who they are that must pass through it — whether they are Christians, or whether persons to be called after all Christians are taken away from the earth. I will, therefore, add no more now, but pray the Lord to bless what has been before us, and use it in clearing away doubts, and difficulties, and clouds, which may have shrouded God’s light from any hearts willing to bow to His word.

On 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5, On

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 enjoin. And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the1 patience of Christ.” (Ver. 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 labors, 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 there 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 towards 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 there fail not many adversaries, 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, 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,” , meant originally “out of place,” and hence strange, marvelous, 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” ver. 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 love toward 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 strong 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 enjoin” (ver. 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 laboring 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 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 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 fullness 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 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 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.

On 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-9, On

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 dishonors 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 rigor 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 command you, brethren, in [the] name of our 1Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw from every brother walking disorderly and not according to the tradition which they 2received from us.”

As yet there had been in the Thessalonian assembly no such case of scandalous wickedness as 1 Cor. 5 afterward 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 offense 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 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 honorably 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 cooling 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 labor and gave rise to the gossiping communication of their fears which would naturally flow from such an error, as it has often done since. 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 dishonor 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; but 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 already 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 honor 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 among “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 offenses 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 offense gravely but with measure. This was righteous, and man (as he was 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 naught from any one, but in toil and travail, working night and day,3 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” (ver. 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 learned 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 naught.

It is to be noticed that this too is not the first time the apostle recalls his labors for his own support while evangelizing 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 above all that attracts and seduces into habitual rest and joy in the Lord, 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 are not only in the spiritual affections but issue also in love to God by the

outward ways which have the divine impress and savor 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 strengthened himself; and this cannot but disclose itself in giving a fresh color to the ordinary things of this life, so that they become in truth the most extraordinary.

But the apostle is careful to assert the laborers' 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” (ver. 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 honor 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 labor 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 equaled 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 dishonored 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 so 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 elders 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 laboring 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, which 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 pretentious 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 laborers' 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 labors 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 laboring when there, and in now laying it upon the saints to give his exhortation a weight with which nothing else could compare?

On 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 3:10-15, On

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. A simple eye 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 commanded you, that if any will not work, neither let him eat. For we hear of some walking among you disorderly, doing no business, but busy bodies. Now those that are such we command 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.” (Ver. 1015.)

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 pre-warned 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 humor 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 busy bodies.” 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 in all else. 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 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 Savior. It is a question of God's kingdom and not of mere morality as if we were only men.

But the saints generally are exhorted to go onwards 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 honorable. 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 dishonorable 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 knows God hears us, he that is not of God hears 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 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 with . Both occurs in the proper and distinctive sense of each in the same context of Gal. 6:9, 10. Honorable and upright practice is the point.

Further, it might seem incredible beforehand, if one did not know it as a fact, that Luther and Calvin, and 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 . as by an epistle [to me]!” Bengel with the Aethiopic of the Polyglotts connects the words with . 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 .

Again, Professor Jowett is not justified in taking here, instead of .. 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 Plato. 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.

On 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18, On

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.”

The saints, through faith rescued from the wrath to come, are serving the 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 armor 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 afterward. 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 to them. “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 favor 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 succor 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 march 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 “place,” for “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 Lib.) 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 it as probable; 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 be at perfect peace, if He be 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 letters 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 apostasy. 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.

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