

Acts - Commentaries by Charles Stanley

Things New and Old: Volume 25, Ananias: Satan's First Attempt Against the Assembly of God (5:1-11)

(Acts 5)

We would ask the attention of the readers of this little magazine to some striking contrasts in connection with this very solemn case of evil. At that time the assembly was composed of believers. "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." They had heard and believed the glad tidings of forgiveness of sins. They had repented, and were baptized, and they continued steadfast in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. The Lord had added them together, and thus the assembly, or church, had been formed.

And they thus added together were the church, or assembly. (See Acts 2:29-47.)

They were then the assembly that believed, and were of one heart and of one soul. This was the church as formed, and baptized by the Holy Ghost. (1 Cor. 12:13.) It was seen thus in its unity, in faith, and the power of the Holy Ghost; and the effect, or fruit of faith was truly marvelous. "Neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all." Still further was the fruit of faith manifested in the selling of their possessions, and bringing the price of the things sold, and laying it at the apostles' feet. Such was the assembly as formed by the Holy Ghost. "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife." Yes, in contrast with the company of believers—not said to be one of them. "A certain man;" not a word as to his being a believer. Nay, as a man he seeks to join himself to them by works. Works first—just what a natural man always seeks to do. He "sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet." Now, as this is the first attempt of Satan to introduce evil into the assembly, by a certain man, thus to join himself to them, it surely demands our closest attention.

What had he done? Just what many now seek to do. He makes a profession that in outward appearance imitates the fruit of faith. At that moment the effect of faith was very striking: the selling of possessions, and laying the price at the apostles' feet. Very well, he does this—he sells his possession, and becomes like those whom the Lord had added, but he kept back part of the price. There is no evidence that he truly recognized God, the Lord Jesus, or the Holy Ghost on earth in the assembly.

It was a wonderful imitation of faith in thus seeking to join himself to them. No such terms or conditions had been propounded, but he acts as though there had. He saw the fruits, or effects, of faith, and he thought by falsehood to obtain a place in the assembly. How terribly all this is exposed! "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?" Who would have thought that this apparently religious act was the very work of Satan—his first effort to introduce evil into the assembly of God? Strange that this has had so little attention. How often we consider the way in which Satan introduced evil in paradise; but here is the assembly, the dwelling-place of God on earth, and here is the first great attempt to introduce evil into it.

God acts by His servant, Peter, in government, and in this case death was the immediate penalty of thus seeking to lie to the Holy Ghost in the assembly. What a contrast, then, this certain man and his wife present to the assembly of believers. In the one case the most wondrous display of works, the fruit of faith; in the other, Satan deceiving the man, and leading him to seek entrance by works and falsehood which are most dishonoring to God, and can only be condemned as wickedness.

We would also call attention to the Lord's work, and to Satan's work. The Lord added believers together by the Holy Ghost. Satan sought by deception to get a certain man and his wife joined to them. Solemn question, dear reader: Have you been added to the Lord, and thus form one of the assembly of God? Are you quite sure it was the Lord? Does the world see in you the fruit, the effects of faith, in a holy life? Or, has Satan deceived you, by leading you to join yourself to the assembly, or the professing church of God, by works? If still a stranger to God, His righteousness in justifying you from all sins, and seeking to join yourself to them by works, you know? Like this very certain man, you have kept back a part of the price. Ananias desired to be thought very religious. Have you had this thought? What a deception of Satan! Oh, how many in this day have joined themselves to the professing church on this very principle of Satan! How many may be seen at what is now called holy communion! and what apparent devotion one day a week? and a few other times in the week, and in other ways apparently very devoted. But see them devouring the most trashy novels, or spending hours of indolence. Thou also hast kept back part of the price. Yes, let us remember this first lesson of Satan's effort against the assembly, the church; that it was by seeming good works to introduce evil. God exposed this, and judged it, surely for our instruction. This would enable us to detect much of Satan's work from that day to this. He was a liar from the beginning, and, as in this case, so we shall find the work of Satan is always marked by a lying spirit. Is it not a solemn thing to lie in connection with the assembly of God?

Is not every attempt to come to God, or to join His people, on the principle of our own works, a lie? Are we not sinners, guilty sinners, deserving hell? To come to God, then, on the ground of being very religious, or very holy, is it not a lie? Have you ever come to God, owning what you are, and all that you have done?

In how many ways may a certain man keep back part of the price of what he professedly gives up? How little of counting all our best things but dung! A man may give up his ecclesiastical position, and connection with what is contrary to Christ; he may seek to join himself to them that are truly gathered to Christ, and still keep back a part. Yea, for years he may be his own center, his thoughts wholly occupied with his work. But let a time of testing come, and, to the surprise of many, that man will soon be turned aside. So of the world, intellect, &c. If intelligent faith has not produced as fruit a full surrender to Christ, failure and sorrow are sure to come.

Let us return to the contrast. In the sight of God grievous evil had presented itself; deception and lying in the very assembly of believers who "were of one heart and of one soul." All looked well, possession sold, money laid at the apostles' feet; but there was deception—a part was kept back. Is it not the same when perverse men have come in, that is, perverting truth by keeping back a part of the facts in any case? Let us not forget that this is the very mark left on the first attempt of Satan to corrupt the church of God. It may be said it is nothing, no doctrine of Christ is attacked. Did God regard this as nothing? How awful the judgment on Ananias and on Sapphira his wife!

What, then, were the effects of this evil in the assembly, and God's judgment of it? Several most striking effects. "Great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." This is sure to be one—the first—effect where God exposes and deals with evil. There will be deep searching of heart, individually and corporately. Then follows a remarkable display of the power of God; and if there be real self-judgment, this will always, in its measure, be the case. Signs and wonders were wrought among the people. We may here notice a very peculiar parenthesis, from the word "and," in verse 12, to the end of verse 14. Let us first see how the narrative runs on, and then return and examine carefully the parenthesis. Signs and wonders, then, were wrought among the people, "Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits; and they were healed every one."

Now is not this most remarkable, and very encouraging? A shocking spirit of falsehood is detected in the assembly, and it is judged and put out; or, in our day, we may have to purge ourselves from it. (2 Tim. 2:20, 21; 3:14; 4:1, 2.) What may we learn and expect from Satan's first attempt? If we are with the Lord, we may, instead of hanging down our hands, expect signs and wonders, souls blest on every side, sin-sick souls, and them that are vexed with unclean spirits restored. "They were healed everyone." What a complete victory this was over Satan! May we never forget it, but have faith in God, and an ever-increasing love to souls!

We will now turn to the still more striking lesson of this parenthesis: ("And they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them; but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.") Thus the purging out of this terrible evil of falsehood not only produced great fear, but great boldness. "They were all with one accord in Solomon's porch." Oh, for more fear of evil, and boldness for Christ! What present lessons these are! The next most important truth seems at first sight a contradiction. "Of the rest durst no man join himself to them." "And believers were the more [or, were more than ever] added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." Here the all-important difference between a man joining himself to them, and being added to the Lord, is brought out in striking contrast. The whole church was then together in the unity of the Spirit; now, a few here and there are gathered together to the Lord. The principle is the same. Clearly the judgment of evil put a stop to, prevented, what Ananias had sought to do—join himself to them. Yes, it stopped men from joining the church, or assembly. This is still the case, no doubt. How can we, they say, join such a company as that? why, they have had such evil in their midst, and such falsehood, and they have had such a to-do; what they call putting out evil, or separating from it. The fact is, these persons durst not join themselves to them; they dread the holy discipline of the assembly, owning the presence and authority of Christ. "Of the rest durst no man join himself to them." Did this in the least stop the work of the Lord? Far from it. "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." This is assuredly most encouraging to any that are truly added together—two or three gathered together to His blessed name, as He said. (Matt. 28:20.) Is it not a mercy that certain men are thus prevented from joining themselves unto them, men deceiving, lying unto the Holy Ghost?

Let us remember the Holy Spirit is as truly present as when evil was thus solemnly judged in the case of this certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife. Satan can imitate the fruit of the Spirit in part. And oh, how he can quote scripture to back his wicked designs! We see how, in this case, his leading Ananias to imitate piety, with lying deception, was judged of God. And in the Lord's temptation we also see how He met the adversary's quotation of scripture. Yes, scripture may be quoted and perverted, and a sad spirit of falsehood be developed in the assembly. The Lord comes in—it may be in judgment—men may be deterred from joining themselves to them yet, so far from this hindering the real work of the Spirit, may we not count on blessing abounding all around, and believers being more than ever added to the Lord? No doubt such as have joined themselves to the twos or threes gathered to Christ will drop out of rank. May the Lord's weak ones go on strong in faith! Is there not a striking likeness between this first effort of Satan to corrupt the church of God, and the very last he has made in these days, probably the last of the church's existence on earth before the coming of the Lord? Never was there a more needed time to walk by faith. God is working His own gracious purposes in the midst of human failure. May the reader beware of taking a false position, if not a believer; and this, not only as to salvation, but also of taking the place of joining the assembly, or of professing to own the Lord present in the midst, if you do not believe it. God will have truth and righteousness in His presence.

We have only suggested a few thoughts,—we believe from the Lord—on this important scripture to believers at this present time. May the Lord lead the reader to meditate upon them, in depend-ence on the Holy Ghost. Nothing could be more solemn as a warning, or more fitted to encourage the Lord's people, whether in gospel work to the multitude, or His assembly, for, notwithstanding all that has happened, believers shall yet be added to the Lord more than ever. C. S.

Things New and Old: Volume 32, First Years of Christianity: No. 5 (4:23-24)

"THAT WHICH WAS FROM THE BEGINNING."

Luke continues the inspired narrative in the Acts. Forty days did Jesus remain, showing Himself to His chosen apostles, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, commanding them not to depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard from Me. They were to be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. At that time they had no idea of the church, or this present period of grace to the Gentiles, but were looking for the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. He opens up quite another work for them—a work that they never fully understood or performed.

After the Holy Ghost was come, He says, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." How little they, how little we, respond to the heart of Christ! And now instead of setting up the kingdom in Israel,

"While they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." There was the cloud, emblem of the divine presence, and He was taken from them. And whilst they gazed up into heaven, two heavenly witnesses assured them that, "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." Thus, if we think of Christianity as a kingdom, it is the kingdom in mystery, for the King is in heaven; hence, Matthew calls it the kingdom of heaven.

As a kingdom, whilst the King is in heaven, there are in it both wheat and tares; the children of God, and the children of the devil. In the kingdom is seen the work of man, and the work of Satan. But the church, the body of Christ, is quite another thing. What He builds shall stand forever. Jesus says, "I will build MY church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt. 16:18.) Let us keep these two things distinct, as we now enter more fully on "That which was from the beginning." The greatest possible mistake is to presume that, that which man builds, is the same as that which Christ builds.

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place."

Everything was now ready for the descent of the Holy Ghost, that the church might be formed, He could not be thus given until Jesus was glorified. If the church had been an earthly society, seeking salvation, it might have been formed whilst Jesus was here. But redemption must be accomplished. Jesus must be raised from the dead and received up to glory, before He, the Spirit, could be sent to form the church. People have no idea what an entirely unknown and new thing the church was. There had been for centuries Jews and Gentiles, but now a third company is formed. The disciples then were all together in one place, when a mighty rushing sound from heaven was heard in Jerusalem, and it filled the house where they were sitting. And they were all, not merely the apostles, but they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and a marvelous miracle bore witness to the presence of the Holy Ghost. They began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. The Jews who came together, who were present in Jerusalem from various nations, heard them speak in their own tongues the wonderful works of God. There was great amazement and wonder.

Peter, an unlettered fisherman, then stood up, and preached such a discourse as had never been heard on this earth. Fifty days before, this very Peter knew not the scriptures that Jesus must rise from the dead. He now opens the scriptures and preaches Jesus of Nazareth, the risen and exalted Lord, and Christ of God. "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear..... Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

This, then, is the first great truth, according to the promise of Jesus: the Holy Ghost is now come and convicts of this dreadful sin. They believed not on Him, but crucified and killed Him, whom God had sent from heaven. He whom this world has murdered, God has raised from the dead, and made both Lord and Christ. Conviction of this terrible sin seizes their hearts, and makes them cry out, "What shall we do, is the reader unconverted?" Do you know that you also belong to that world which has killed and rejected the Lord Jesus, now seated at the right hand of God? And what must they do? "Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." The very enemies, and murderers, must become the very disciples of Jesus, and they must fully confess this discipleship in baptism. What a complete and confessed change of mind, what self-judgment, for that is what the word translated "repent" implies. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added about three thousand souls." They were deeply convicted of sin, they believed, were completely changed in mind, and showed it by being gladly baptized as the disciples of the crucified and risen Jesus, whom they had so lately rejected and murdered. All this was real matter of fact, confessed, and seen of all men. They were not ashamed to own Him Lord and Christ. Their sins were forgiven. They were gathered, and by the Holy Ghost added to, and formed the assembly of God. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers..... And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house [or at home]; did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved," or were being saved—that is, from day to day. All were added, but to what? evidently to that which the Holy Ghost was forming, not to different bodies or churches of men, but to the one only church of God.

It is important to notice the connection there was between repentance and baptism: so the Jews must have understood it. John preached, saying, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And great multitudes went out to him, "and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." (Matt. 3:1-6.) "John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for [or unto] the remission of sins," &c. (Mark 1:4, 5.) Confession of sins was the scripture ground of forgiveness from the days of ancient Job. "He looketh upon men; and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not: he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light." We see how this was in the end produced in Job. He says, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. And it was so." When Job was brought to that point, instead of seeking to maintain his own righteousness, he now counted himself vile, completely changed his mind, in dust and ashes. There God met him in unhindered blessing. (Job 33 and 13.)

Was not baptism the outward profession of this entire change of mind? On the day of Pentecost there was a vast multitude of Jobs, so far as seeking to maintain their own religiousness, or righteousness. With astonishment they were convicted of the greatest sin a creature is capable of. They had rejected and murdered the Holy and the Just One. See how Peter, or rather the Holy Ghost, pressed this. In chapter 3. He says, "But ye denied the Holy One and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you: and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses." And then, after showing them that all this was what God had made known by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, he calls upon them to repent, to entirely change their minds from the mad course they were pursuing; and as many as believed and did thus change their minds were baptized, and this was the evidence, or proof, of confession of sins. In the preaching then of Peter to the Jews, repentance, baptism, and forgiveness were most intimately connected in the name of Jesus. And they thus became the disciples of the crucified and risen Christ.

And when preaching the gospel to Jews, Mahomedans, or heathens now, these things would be the same. We could not admit the repentance of a Jew to be genuine if he refused to be baptized.

It is somewhat different in an already baptized country. There is little or no connection there between repentance and baptism. Unconverted parents, who never have repented, bring their children to be baptized, but this is confusion. They are in the nominal profession of Christendom, and as such they must be dealt with in preaching. Practically they are much like circumcised Jews. But repentance there must be, and a repentance so deep as to set aside all hopes of improvement in self. Self must be counted vile, abhorred. But then this true repentance is scarcely known. It is most probable, from the subsequent history of Peter himself, that he may not have fully understood the repentance of a Jew, and his baptism unto a DEAD and risen Christ.

The death of Christ was the complete end of Judaism. Christ had been a Jew in the flesh. But now dead and risen He was a Jew in the flesh no more. Paul shows that we know Him no more as such. But then Judaism was God's trial of man. Just so, but that trial was over in the rejection and murder of Jesus. The whole administration of that system of law, and trial of man, was over, abolished, and in every way a new thing had come in. Yes, so new that it is spoken of as new creation. If we only understood this, we should see how strikingly the figure of baptism shows the end of man, the first man in the death of Christ.

It was most important to show this first in Jerusalem, the center of Judaism, and to man under law. God in grace bore with the disciples, still clinging to the temple and its service. But now the great High Priest had passed into the heavens, of what value was the temple priesthood? And now the one sacrifice, offered once, in continuance perfected the worshipper, what was the value of all the bloodshed in the offerings of the law? Jesus was dead. There was the end of the ages of trial of man. The first man, under the most favorable circumstances at Jerusalem, is set aside forever. A new order has begun—a new creation, that which had been hid in God. The one purpose of His heart was now an accomplished fact.

These were the first clays of the church. What a wonderful description we have of it in Acts 4:23-34, "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own: but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all."

Some Papers on the Second Coming of Christ and on Prophecy, Part 4 - Questions of Interest Relating to the Coming of Christ and His Reign on Earth (3:21)

"Will you notice Acts 3:21? I have lately seen it stated with confidence, that no one could answer the objections contained in that text which reads, "Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution." But the writer does not say what the prophecies are, that remain to be fulfilled; but dwells largely on death, of which Isaiah speaks in chapter 25:8, "He will swallow up death in victory." So that Christ cannot come before the millennium. May it be said, when Christ comes for His saints and they are caught up, that Christ is still in heaven?"

On the repentance of Israel, Peter assures them that God would "send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." It is very strange that the writer should find difficulties in this verse and its context. I remember about fifty years ago, this scripture was specially used to many to show them that the Lord would come at the commencement of the millennium. Take this illustration. There has been a revolution in Brazil. The emperor has been rejected; he is received in, say, England. And it is said England will receive him until the restitution, or restoration of the empire in Brazil. Would that mean that England would receive the rightful emperor until after the empire, or until the time when the empire should be set up again?

The Jews had murdered the Christ of God, their true Messiah, long foretold in Scripture. God had raised Him from the dead, and received Him up to heaven. The heaven must receive him until the times of restitution, or restoration of His empire. At present they are rebels against God and against their Messiah. Could anything be plainer? To say that this means the heavens must receive Him, until after His millennial kingdom is over, come to an end, would not only be contrary to all Scripture, but would have no meaning in it.

Let us, however, turn to the scripture referred to—Micah 4, 5. In chapter 4 we have the future reign of Messiah; all nations going up to worship in Zion; no more war; swords and spears turned into implements of happy husbandry. This blessed scene shall surely come, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. "And the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth, even forever." "The first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem." Then a time of great labor, and sorrow, and pain is spoken of. "Be in pain, and labor to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail." Then the Judge of Israel shall be smitten with a rod upon the cheek. Now mark the special verse referred to by Peter. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting [or the days of eternity]" (Micah 5:2). "Therefore will He give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth" (vs 3). Then follows the millennial blessing of Jacob.

Such is the absolute inspired word of the Lord. How much has been fulfilled at this hour? Evidently Micah 4:1-8 has not in the least had its fulfillment. It would have had it, had they repented at the preaching of Peter. But they did not. It is no theory, but an undeniable fact that the kingdom has not yet come to the people of Israel. Then has the great pain and tribulation spoken of come? No, for at that time they shall be delivered; or at least the remnant of them. At the destruction of Jerusalem they were not delivered, but destroyed by hundreds of thousands, or scattered among all nations. And they are, according to the sure word of God, to be given up, until the time of travail, and until she hath brought forth the remnant spoken of in Micah 5:3.

Has the Judge that is to reign been smitten with a rod upon the cheek? He has. The Son of God has been smitten, bruised, spit upon. Has He come from Bethlehem? He has. That was the place of His incarnation, or birth. Has He gone forth into the heavens unto God? "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted" (Acts 2:32-33). How long will the heavens retain Him? Until the times of restitution, and so forth. That is plainly the time of the kingdom of God on earth. Who is He? He that is to be

ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity. Yes, He is the eternal Son of God.

Do the Jews know all this? No, they are blind yet. But the day will come when He shall say to them, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." Read that chapter of their coming glory—Isaiah 60. In no sense has this been fulfilled yet.

How long now has Israel to wait for these scenes of blessing and the reign of Messiah at Zion? "Until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth" (Micah 5:3). Was not that travail when Christ the man child was born? No, there was no travail then. "Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man-child" (Isaiah 66:7). What does she bring forth then when she travaileth? "As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children." Then follows her millennial joy (Isaiah 66:8 to end). Oh, who believes the word of God — the glories of our long rejected Jesus — the blessings of His earthly people Israel? Do not mistake. In all these scriptures there is no reference whatever to the church. But He who is Israel's Messiah is also the Head of the church — His body. Hence, His coming to take the church does not affect these questions in the least. The Jews will not see Him come for His bride, may not know of it, except the great wonder there may be when every true Christian is gone in the twinkling of an eye. If we confound the hopes of the church, and the future kingdom and earthly glory of Israel, all must be confusion and difficulty.

You say the writer dwells largely on death; speaks of Isaiah 25:8, so that Christ, he says, cannot come before the millennium. Now if you read the whole chapter you will find that this event, "He will swallow up death in victory," is really what ushers in the millennium. As it goes on to say, "And the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people [Israel] shall He take away from off all the earth." "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah." Oh, how simple all this would be if we believed God meant what He said. He is not speaking of the church in Isaiah 25, but of Israel and Judah. (See Isaiah 2:1-2).

Surely the writer could not have been aware that the Holy Spirit had explained when this would take place. In 1 Corinthians 15 we have the coming of the Lord, and the resurrection of those that are His at His coming (vs. 23), and the blessedness of that resurrection, and the change in a moment of those that shall be alive when He comes for them. Read to verse 53. Now the Holy Spirit says that it is when all this has taken place that Isaiah 25 will be fulfilled. "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, THEN shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54). Is it not then perfectly clear that this resurrection, described in 1 Corinthians 15, takes place at the coming of the Lord? "They that are Christ's at His coming" (vs. 23). It is quite true that the end, or second resurrection, takes place after the kingdom is delivered up (vs. 24). The order of resurrection is thus described. "Christ the firstfruits." Then, "Afterward they that are Christ's at His coming." We know that more than eighteen hundred years have intervened between these two parts. "Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God." And we know from Revelation 20, that at least one thousand years will intervene between the resurrection, of "they that are His," and the rest of the dead.

This also is certain, that as the apostle refers to a scripture in Isaiah, that ushers in the millennium, as the time of the resurrection of "those that are His" in verse 54 — "Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" — that therefore the coming of the Lord, and this the first resurrection, takes place before, and not after the millennium.

First Years of Christianity: And What Is the Church?, First Years of Christianity, The: First State of the Church (26:12-23)

We have seen the formation of the Church, or, assembly; its united prayer; the place shaken where they were assembled; and all filled with the Holy Spirit. The Word of God was spoken with boldness. All that believed were of one heart and soul; the apostles with great power gave witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon all. Such was the assembly in the beginning. Alas, what a contrast now!

And yet the true heavenly character of the new assembly was not then fully, if at all, revealed. The man who was the chosen vessel to make known the Church, was not even yet converted from Judaism. This man, Saul of Tarsus, was a mad persecutor of the disciples, the great enemy of Christ. As he was on his way to Damascus, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven, brighter than the noonday sun. The mad persecutor fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" Amazed at these words, he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." What a revelation, and what a revolution in this man!

The Jesus he persecuted was the Lord of glory. But most wonderful—this Lord of glory owned every disciple, every true believer, as part of Himself. What was done to them, was done to Him. This contained the mystery—the stupendous fact—that every believer now on earth was one with the Lord of glory. Many years after this we find it written, "As He is so are we." How little had Saul thought that what he did to the feeblest disciple, he did to Jehovah Jesus, Lord and Christ. What a repentance, what a change of mind! Trembling and astonished, he said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" He was directed to Ananias, a devoted disciple in the city. Ananias was greatly afraid of this terrible persecutor. The Lord calmed his fears, and said to him, "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel."

Such was the effect on Saul of this revelation, that for three days he was blind and could neither eat nor drink. His eyes were then opened, and he at once proved the reality of his repentance, or change of mind, by being baptized, and took his place with the disciples as those whose sins were washed away. The full account of his commission to preach and teach in the name of the Lord Jesus we find in Acts 26:12-23.

It must be observed that, as the sample minister of Christ, he received his commission and authority to preach direct from Christ Himself—not from man, not from the Church. He takes great pains, in Galatians 1, to prove that this was from God. Never did he go to Jerusalem, to the apostles even, to receive authority to preach. He was only recognized by them. "When James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision" (Gal. 2:9).

It may justly be asked, if the apostles or the Church never assumed to give authority to preach the gospel, or teach, in the first years of Christianity, how is it that those who profess to be the successors of the apostles do so now? That is a question for them to answer. They will tell you, they have derived that power and authority to appoint and ordain those who alone shall be set apart to preach the gospel, and administer the sacraments. And yet in the beginning there was no such power or authority in the hands of these very apostles. If there was, let it be shown. Paul was most jealous to disown all such authority.

The subject of the Christian ministry is a deeply interesting one. Does that which assumes to be that ministry now, correspond with what it was in the beginning, or is it a totally different thing? Men are now ordained or authorized by men to preach and teach. But we must honestly own that there is nothing in the New Testament account that corresponds to this. There was the one Church of God, or assembly of God; and all Christians formed that one assembly. There was the church of God at Rome, but there was no church of Rome at any place but Rome. There was no distinction between the assembly in Greece, and in Italy, or Syria. There were no denominations. If you had spoken of the church of Rome, or church of England in Scotland, or in Ireland, not a man on earth would have understood you. Then, if there were no denominations or national churches of the world, there could be no ministers of such churches. Now since this is assuredly, manifestly, the case, it follows that people may be members of such human churches, and not be members of the one body of Christ at all. Quite true, you will say, no doubt millions are so at this day. Then does it not equally follow that men may be ministers of such churches, and not even be Christians, and not ministers of Christ—in a word, that the Christian ministry, and the vast denominational ministry, are two very distinct things? There is one thing perhaps above all others that marks this distinction.

The true Christian ministry owned and had the guidance of the Holy Spirit where to minister. The ministry which is of man, is solely appointed by man, and scarcely dares truly to recognize the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Let us turn to the Word. We will first take Peter. Christ appointed him (John 21:15-17) and gave him the special ministry to open the door of the kingdom to Jews and Gentiles (Matt. 16:19). As to any other appointment from men, he had none. Human education, none. He was an unlettered man (Acts 4:13). Could the Holy Spirit come down from heaven and use such a man? What a question! Let the preaching in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit answer (Acts 2; 3), and how distinctly he had the guidance of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 10).

Then let us take the ministry of Paul. Sometimes Acts 13:1-4 is quoted as authority for ordaining a man to be the minister, preacher, and pastor. This scripture is doubtless a most important one as to ministry in every way. It gives us the most distinct view of true Christian ministry that we could have. Here is the assembly as seen in the first years of Christianity: "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen,....and Saul." Mark, all these were prophets and teachers. They were the chosen gifts of the ascended Lord. "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Let us then take Saul. We read at his conversion that he "was...certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God." This gave great amazement to all, but his authority to preach and the power were alike from Christ alone. Then Barnabas took him to Jerusalem, and told the apostles how he had preached at Damascus. "And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians," etc. He is then sent to Tarsus (Acts 9:18-30).

Then again in the formation of the Church from the Gentiles at Antioch, Barnabas went to Tarsus and brought Saul: "And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people" (Acts 11:21-26). Indeed, this scene at Antioch (chap. 13) is after the collection had been sent by the hands of Barnabas and Saul, and after their return. "And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry," or charge (chaps. 11:30; 12:25). So that there is no sense whatever in quoting chapter 13 as authority for doing the very opposite of what the Spirit did here.

Now look at the assembly gathered together at Antioch. There is no man as the minister of that assembly, but the prophets and teachers. They minister to the Lord. Where is this the case now? Is there no president? Yes, the Lord by the Holy Spirit. And where He is, there need be no other chairman or president. They so own the presence of the Holy Spirit that they have His very guidance as to the persons He appoints for a special mission. Here is the secret of the power of the first years of the Church. And there is only power now, in proportion as we truly own the Holy Spirit. He is the power.

In all the great gatherings of Christians, can you tell me of one that answers to this assembly at Antioch? Is not the Holy Spirit as truly here now as then? Assuredly, but men put a man in his place, and then pray for the Holy Spirit to come!

Is it not incredible that there should be such darkness as to quote this scripture, when men appoint a man to be the minister over a church? The Holy Spirit did not say, Separate Me one of these teachers for this special work, but He sends two; and we see this principle throughout. And in the preachings, it is Paul and Barnabas speaking boldly, though Paul was the chief speaker (chaps. 13:43-46; 14:12; 15:35). "Preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also."

And after the separation of Paul and Barnabas, it is the same with other companions, Silas and Timotheus (chap. 16). And how the Holy Spirit guided their steps as to where to preach. For the time they were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia; but they were guided to Europe, and from place to place (chap. 16:6-9; etc.). How distinctly also the Spirit guided Philip to join himself to the eunuch, sitting in his chariot. "Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him." (See Acts 8:26-40.) But we look in vain for a single instance of human ordination of a minister over a church to preach or to teach. It is said of Apollos, when he began to preach the gospel, "When he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace" (Acts 18:27). Surely this is an important scripture for our guidance now.

But if such was the Christian ministry in the first years of the Church, as seen in the Acts, and fully borne out in the epistles, where is that same true Christian ministry now? It is quite true that each of the various divisions of modern Christendom has its ministry. But what have all these in common with the ministry of Christ, or Christian ministry, as seen in the Word of God? It is high time to search the Scriptures to see what is of God, and what is of man. The apostolic appointment of elders and deacons was quite another thing. These might, or might not, be the gifts of Christ to teach or preach. The elders were appointed to care for and guide the assembly in spiritual matters, and the deacons to care for the poor in temporal things. The apostles could also delegate a Timothy or a Titus, but very few would assume that we have apostles now. Let us then, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, turn to His inspired epistles, and inquire what was the Church, what its ministry, and what

the doctrines taught in the first years of Christianity.

Some Papers on the Second Coming of Christ and on Prophecy, Part 11 - Questions of Interest Relating to the Coming of Christ and His Reign on Earth (24:15)

“One of the greatest difficulties in believing that the Lord will return before the millennium, is that it involves a totally different interpretation of passages of Scripture, upon which have been based what may be called household truths of Christianity, such for instance as the general resurrection and the general judgment, apparently held by all Christians since the times of the apostles. Many passages speak of “the resurrection” without the least intimation that there will be more than one, or that any particular resurrection is meant, and Acts 24:15 refers to “a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust,” implying that both will be raised at one and the same time. As to the general judgment, many passages speak of “the judgment,” it is “appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). A special day is also appointed for this (Acts 17:31). The quick and the dead are also spoken of together as being judged (2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5). Is not all this upset and the passages strained to mean something else, if our Lord will return before the millennium, and only a portion of the dead arise at His coming?”

Unhappily it is too true that the terms “general resurrection” and “general judgment” are become household doctrines with many Christians. It is strange, that it should be so, seeing that neither of the terms occurs in Scripture. It also shows how readily certain statements are received and held as truths without the least trouble being taken to see whether they are really taught in Scripture or not.

We can easily understand that in some places, as in Acts 24:15, the fact that all mankind will be raised again, may be alluded to, without there being any occasion to speak of whether all will be raised at one time or not; whereas of other passages the whole force would be lost if the distinction between the just and the unjust was not kept in view.

In the first place it should be noticed that in some passages the true translation is not “resurrection of the dead” but “out of” the dead; that is, some are raised from among the dead, leaving the rest of the dead still in their graves. Now if God has made this distinction in His Word — and He has — it has surely been done to teach us the difference. Unhappily this distinction is not sufficiently noticed in the Authorized Version (KJV), but it has been shown in other translations. The Authorized Version does translate in several places “from the dead,” but it has not been sufficiently noticed that this means something quite different from a resurrection of the dead.

If we think of the resurrection of our Lord, it must be manifest to all that His resurrection was a rising from among the dead, as we read in 1 Corinthians 15:12,20; and if the same expression is used for any of God’s people, it must surely mean the same. Take, for instance, our Lord’s declaration that those who will be raised from among the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage: they are the sons of God (Luke 20:33,36).

In Acts 4:1, 2, we read that the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees were grieved at Peter and John because they taught the people and preached through Jesus the resurrection from among the dead.

John 5:29 speaks of two distinct resurrections, the resurrection of life, and the resurrection of damnation (judgment). And what can be plainer than what we read in Revelation 20? “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection.” “The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.” What can be the meaning of there being a first resurrection if there is to be but one? And what can “the rest of the dead” mean unless some will have been raised previously?

This seemed so plain and positive that we were a little curious to see how it could be otherwise explained. A commentary thus speaks of it: “It is called the first resurrection in contradistinction from the second and last — the general resurrection — when all the dead will be literally raised up from their graves, and assembled for the judgment (Rev. 20:12). It is not necessary to suppose that what is called here the “first resurrection” will resemble the real and literal resurrection in every respect. All that is meant is, that there will be such a resemblance as to make it proper to call it a resurrection — a coming to life again. This will be, as explained in the notes to verse 4, in the honor done to the martyrs; in the restoration of their principles as the great actuating principles of the church; and perhaps in the increased happiness conferred on them in heaven, and in their being employed in promoting the cause of truth in the world. This may explain how the term “the general judgment” has become a household dogma among Christians; but is it not arrived at by the shameful frittering away of the plain meaning of Scripture? With such treatment, alas! the inspired Word may be made to mean almost anything. Surely this is the straining of Scripture, rather than taking it to mean simply what it says.

As to there being a general judgment, only a few passages need be referred to. By comparing Matthew 25:31-46 with Revelation 20:11-15, in both of which we have before us a sessional judgment, it will be seen that they cannot refer to the same. One speaks of the living only — the nations — the other, the dead only; one speaks of some being blessed, and some being cursed; the other, all are lost; one speaks only of a particular sin — the treatment of the Lord’s brethren; the other, of men’s general sins, as detailed in God’s book of remembrance. How can the two possibly refer to the same occasion? and how can either refer to a general judgment of all mankind?

The Christian will not stand to be judged with the unconverted. Our Lord declared that they should not come into judgment (John 5:24). They will be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, but not to be judged for their sins; for the Lord Himself will sit on the throne, and He bore the punishment for their sins, and put them away forever.

In all that we have been looking at there is nothing that in any way interferes with the coming of the Lord being the true and blessed hope of the Christian. Indeed, there is one passage that so links the resurrection of the righteous dead with the rapture of the living, that if taken in its plain signification would remove many a difficulty and would furnish the Christian with the brightest of prospects: “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 which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the

Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

May this be the living hope of all God's beloved people!

From Things New and Old, vol. 33.

Things New and Old: Volume 32, Close of Another Year, The (20:24-35)

Yes, another year will soon have passed away forever. What a year! How rapid the increase of evil! How have we spent this year? Soon our course will be run. How shall we each one be able to say, "I have finished my course." The apostle could say, when speaking of his warfare in the gospel, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy; and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more." (Acts 20:24, 25.) He seems to have been aware that his active warfare service was drawing to a close. A little later on he could say, "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Tim. 4:7, 8.)

Paul may have referred to a remarkable scripture in the Old Testament. Numb. 8:24, 25: "This is it that belongeth unto the Levites: from twenty and five years old and upward they shall go in to wait [or war the warfare] upon the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. And from the age of fifty years, they shall cease from the warfare of the service and shall serve no more." Thus their course of warfare service was from twenty-five to fifty years of age. And of that warfare service they shall serve no more.

"But shall minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of the congregation, to keep the charge, and shall do no service. Thus shalt thou do unto the Levites touching their charge." (Ver. 26.) Thus we have both the individual warfare service, and the ministry with their brethren. How is it we have so lost the beautiful teaching of these types written for our instruction? Is it not because the distinction between individual service and responsibility has become almost everything? And the precious ministry with our brethren in the sanctuary almost ignored?

An aged servant of Christ may find that his strength fails; he is no longer able to war the warfare. He says, I have finished my course, I can no longer get about; if he tries, he breaks down. He can no longer, it may be, preach the gospel, or lecture. Well, he has finished his course. Many who may have seen him in the warfare for long years will see his face no more. But should he be discouraged or distressed? Surely there is immense comfort in this precious ministry with his brethren in the sanctuary. (Ver. 26.) This ministry may also close, or it may go on until that blessed moment, the coming of the Lord. Every servant of Christ may now wait expecting to see his Lord.

In the beginning there was both the hard warfare service, and the ministry, when the assembly were gathered together in the sanctuary of His blessed presence. We find as to "the ministry" that "the prophets might speak two or three." And some of us remember the times of refreshing, when the children of God gathered in real dependence on the Holy Ghost, and it was so. Blessed seasons. Shall we give up this ministering with our brethren in the sanctuary? It will be sad for us if we do. But have we not too much done so? I beg my brethren to ponder these things. And we have seen, as in Paul's case, how the Lord can find ways and means of using His aged servant, even if he be in a prison.

When his active course was finished, how blessed "the ministry" to the whole church of God, though a chained prisoner at Rome. And another in his day, when shut up by the priests in Bedford prison, was used in sending out his Pilgrim, which has been made a blessing to thousands.

It is very precious for an aged and infirm servant of the Lord, to experience His care and love even when He says, "There, now, as to your warfare which has been so dear to you, you shall so serve no more. But I give you a little space now, for ministry with your brethren. And it may be till I come." Oh, what depths of special sovereign mercy if the aged servant can in any little measure repeat the words, of Paul. (Acts 20:26-35 Tim. 4:7, 8.)

Precious Lord, how blessed to minister, to serve, with Thy brethren, until we see Thy face! And if taken before to say to beloved fellow laborers, "Feed the church of God." Yes, the whole church of God. C.S.

Things New and Old: Volume 25, This Same Jesus (1:2)

"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." Acts 1:11.

These words have been used by the Holy Ghost in a remarkable manner in Upper Egypt. The Coptic Church have, through all these centuries, held fast the true divinity of Christ; but, as is well known, they lost the true humanity of Christ since His resurrection. To them there were not now the two natures in Christ: only the divine.

So that about five years ago, when the Lord's servants began to preach the coming of the Lord, it was said the Copts would never listen to such a thought. On the contrary, God was pleased to use this scripture, to produce an entire change, and great numbers now believe the true humanity, as well as the Godhead of the Lord Jesus. They are now preaching the gospel, and waiting for "this same Jesus" from heaven.

When we remember the meaning of the word Jesus, the assurance is very sweet. "This same Jesus [Savior] which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

When the angel of the Lord announced the birth of Jesus, he said of Mary, "She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: [that is, Savior] for he shall save his people from their sins." "And they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." (Matt, 1:21.) What a birth! What a name! The incarnate Son, the Savior-God with us. Trace His wondrous path from the manger to the cross. At every step, in every act, we see the Savior-God with us. By His almighty power, He calms the raging sea; restores the dead to life; gives sight to the blind; and healeth all diseases. But oh, the display of tender, infinite love! See this same Jesus when the sinner weeps at His feet. Harken to those first but tender words, "Thy sins are forgiven.....Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." Oh, the deep untold joy of His heart in seeking the lost! When another sinning daughter of Samaria came to the well to draw water, oh hear the words of Emmanuel! "Give me to drink." And in answer to her great surprise He said, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." This is that same Jesus that loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. Fully did he enter into their death sorrow. "Jesus wept." This same Jesus is coming again. The same Savior that bare our sins in His own body on the cross. The same Jesus that was raised again from the dead for our justification; and showed Himself to His disciples alive from the dead. "Jesus [the Savior] himself stood in the midst of them and saith unto them, Peace be unto you."

Not only as God, truly God, Emmanuel, God with us, not a spirit, but the true humanity risen from the dead. He said, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he showed unto them his hands and his feet." (Luke 24:36-43.) This is a matter of eternal moment. "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." (1 Cor. 15:17.)

The resurrection of the same (Savior) Jesus is the crowning-point in the preaching at Pentecost and onwards. "This Jesus [Savior] hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2) "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. And by him all that believe are justified," &c. (Acts 13:38.)

He will come as Judge; but He will first come as Savior. He comes as Savior to take His own to be with Himself. When He shall come as Judge they will come with Him. He will come and reign in righteousness. And righteousness shall cover the earth. All things put under Him. "But now we see not yet all things put under him, but we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory," &c. (Heb. 2:9.) This same Jesus, as Savior, shall come again. This was the hope of the church in the beginning. The Thessalonian converts were "Turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." (1 Thess. 1:10.)

It is blessed to own Him both Lord and Christ. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" (1 Thess. 2:19.) "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Phil. 3:20.) So also Paul writes to Titus, his own son in the faith, "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ: who gave himself for us," &c. (Titus 2:13.)

It is thus most important to keep before our souls the true humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He comes, the same Jesus, in all the tenderness of infinite love. The same Jesus who said, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name." Yes, "having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." To them He said, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:1, 2.) Thus He speaks to us. And then this same Jesus speaks to the Father, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory." (John 17:24.)

Surely, then, He comes, as the same Jesus; in like manner as He ascended up into heaven.

Behold Him. "And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God." (Luke 24:50-53.)

If such was the joy at parting, with the testimony, that this same Jesus shall so come again in like manner, what will be His joy in meeting in the air, those whom the Father has given unto Him! And what our joy and worship, as we enter the glory; and in that glory the place prepared for us! Oh, think of this same Jesus coming Himself to take us to Himself—to welcome us home. Once He bore our sins, now He comes without sin unto salvation. Our hearts shall adore Him as the Lamb once slain. The same Jesus, forever Emmanuel, God with us. What a Savior! What a victory! How deep is God's mercy to us! How great is His love! "That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Yes, we are waiting for the display of all this Wondrous grace at the return of this same Jesus, who is gone up into heaven.

For centuries this wondrous scripture had been entirely overlooked, and Christians had been taught to look for Christ as Judge, and not first as the same Savior. He hath loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood. He will not come to judge His own perfect work, or lay to our charge the sins He bore. Yes, soon we shall see this same Jesus; He who died for our sins according to the scriptures; He who was raised from the dead, our ever subsisting righteousness; He who has never failed to intercede for us above, or restore our souls whilst we are here below. If He has by the Holy Ghost made us to know our own vileness (that in us, that is in our flesh, there dwelleth no good thing), it is to make known to us that He is "made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." (1 Cor. 1:30.) If we have been disappointed, in vainly seeking perfectness, or sinlessness in our poor, wretched selves, it is to have found it all in Him. Infinite love possessed in Him. Oh, boundless treasures of perfect love in Him, and shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost! We shall see Him as He is, and be like Him then, no more to desire, but forever to enjoy. Yea, even now, He is ours, and we are His. May we not, then, even now, no more merely desire, but repose in the fullness of infinite love! When He fills the vision of the soul, self, good or bad, must disappear. If we are occupied with ourselves (and, alas! how often this is the case), then the eye is not filled with this same Jesus, nor the heart waiting for Him from heaven. Oh, blessed link, nothing can part us from the love of Christ, this same Savior. He who shall come to judge the nations is the coming Savior to us. How different to the world. "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced

him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen." (Rev. 1:7.)

Ah, reader, will your eyes behold Him as your Savior, or will you wail with the world, when He comes to judge? Is He your Savior now? Or do you belong to the world which still rejects His love and mercy? He may come to take His own today, and then would you be left behind?

He says, "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Rev. 22:16, 17.)

Precious words of Jesus, Jehovah Savior! Bright and Morning Star. Surely the bride that knows Him must say, Come. Looking for this same Jesus cannot you say, Come? And it is the glory of the grace, to the last moment of this day of mercy. "And let him that is athirst come: and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Blessed closing words of this same Jesus.

C. S.

First Years of Christianity: And What Is the Church?, First Years of Christianity, The: Effects of Gospel (17:2)

We have dwelt on the facts of the gospel in Acts 17, so very contrary to all human plans and theology. As Paul opened the Scriptures, it was not to show what man must do, as in the law of old, but what Christ must needs do: that Christ must needs suffer, and rise again from the dead, and that this Jesus whom he preached is Christ. Let us now see what was the effect of this singular preaching. Did you ever hear preaching of this kind—not a word about what you must do, but all about what Jesus has done?

Let us go back to those early years when Paul, fresh from the heavenly vision, having seen the glorified Jesus, who must, and had died for his sins according to the Scriptures. No doubt the certainty in his own soul carried great weight with it. He was sure he had the authority of God.

Three poor men arrive in the rich, populous, wicked heathen city of Thessalonica. They had been treated as dangerous vagabonds at another city, and were sore with stripes; and so poor and friendless they seem, that they have to labor night and day to get bread.

They had no authority from man or from the Roman state. They were the disciples of a Man who had been executed in the most degraded and cruel manner. There was a Jews' meeting room, or synagogue, in that city in those days, in which the law of God was read. There was often speaking in that synagogue, but always teaching what man was to do to attain to righteousness; not one speaker or hearer had ever been known to attain to righteousness before God.

For three sabbath days these poor men went into that synagogue. Never had such preaching been heard in that city before. It was a strange contrast to all that had ever been heard there. It was not what they must do, as we have seen, not one word of the kind; yet it was just the thing needed. Many felt they needed salvation first, and fruits would follow. All that is said, however, is that they believed the preaching, and consorted with Paul and Silas a great multitude. These poor men soon had to flee for their lives, as usual, from the cruel hatred of the Jews, who could not endure such doctrine. They would rather seek after righteousness by their own works.

God ordered that an inspired letter was sent by these poor men to all these believers, as soon as they had heard from them. And as this is just a sample of the effect of the preaching of Paul, and others with him, in the First Years of Christianity, it is a great privilege to have such an inspired letter, showing the immediate effects of the true gospel in those days. This assembly at Thessalonica does not seem to have had any further human help until Timothy was sent to see how they did (1 Thess. 3:2).

So all that we read of are the effects of a few weeks' preaching in a heathen city, given up to demon worship. We shall also find in this letter a good outline of the teaching of the Apostle to such as are saved.

The first thing that strikes one is, that all these believers are at once brought into the position of the assembly in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. This assembly was gathered out from Jews and Gentiles by these few weeks' preaching. This, as we see elsewhere, was the work of the Holy Spirit. There are no jarring sects or parties, but the one assembly in that city, and in such a blessed relationship in the Father and in Jesus Christ. And their condition was such that Paul could give thanks to God always for them all, making mention of them in his prayers.

And what was the effect of this singular preaching as to good works? He says, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father." It must be right seed that produced such fruit as this. There could be no uncertainty as to their election of God. For the gospel he preached, so different from anything ever heard before, was not "in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance." Now this is never the case where a mixture of law and grace is preached, but it is always a vague hope, and all is uncertainty. No such uncertainty accompanied the true gospel in those first years. The full assurance of salvation in the power of the Holy Spirit always leads the happy believer to long to make it known to others.

And mark another effect. These poor heathen were turned to God, from idols, "to serve the living and true God." Was not this wonderful? Did not God set His seal to His gospel in this marvelous result?

But were there no worldly advantages held out to these first Christians? Not a single earthly advantage, but the very opposite. It was "to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." They, as everywhere, received the word in much affliction and persecution, and with only one hope before them, the return of the Lord Jesus, the coming of the Lord. Paul himself had no other hope, as he says, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?"

Oh, those first years! how different from these last days! One marked difference was this: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God," etc. Is it not generally the opposite of this now? Doctrines are believed, because certain men teach them. What should we think of a child, if a father sent him a letter, and he said, I will believe it if the servants say it is so?

Let it not be supposed from the gospel preached—of salvation entirely through what Christ had done — that when these hearers were born again, were saved, were justified forever from all things, that they were not then taught to walk as children of God. No, Paul says, "As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father does his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory." As he says elsewhere, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works" (Titus 3:8). The order is this: first, the grace of God bringeth salvation to all men; second, this teaches us to lead a holy life; third, to look for the blessed hope of the coming of the Lord. (See Titus 2:11-13.) How simple this was in the first years!

Such was the order, and such was the effect in Thessalonica. First, the free sovereign favor of God, bringing salvation—all accomplished by Christ—not a word of doing or law-keeping. Second, they were, when saved, exhorted to walk worthy of God, who had called them unto His kingdom and glory. Third, they were separated to God, to wait for Jesus from heaven. And the power of the truth was so great that it spread in all directions.

The more we study this epistle to these young converts from Jews and Gentiles, the more wonderful we see the effects of the gospel Paul preached. Just a few weeks' preaching, and a multitude of believers was the result, and every one of them in holy separation to Christ. Is there any town or city now on this earth that answers to this? With all the vast machinery and privileges of these last days, can we find even a village where ALL the believers are separated, gathered to Christ, with no sect or party in it, but all under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all enjoying the full assurance of faith, all waiting for Jesus from heaven? Where shall we look for the Christianity of these first years? How many cities may be found where there is not one believer really separated to the name and person of Christ, and not one really waiting for Him from heaven, where it would be difficult to find anything that really answers to the first years? We must own the truth of this.

The Holy Spirit has not left on record the manner or order of their meetings for worship or teaching. We may, however, learn from Acts 17, that soon after their conversion, Paul and his companions had to escape by night (vs. 10). Neither did they seem to have had the least help from any other servants of the risen Christ, except the visit of Timothy (1 Thess. 3:1-2). Yet there were those among themselves "which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you." And they were to esteem them very highly. And they were enabled to edify one another (chap. 5:11-14). We shall find this in keeping with other epistles we may shortly notice.

Thus, though we have not an exact description of a meeting for worship and edification, yet they had both, without the arrangements of modern Christendom. And it would be a most important inquiry to examine the Acts and the epistles, to see what we can learn as to the way in which the assemblies came together in the First Years of Christianity. Have you ever done this, beloved reader? We are so liable to take for granted that what each of us has been brought up in, is the right and scriptural thing, without ever comparing it with the Word of God. At present our inquiry is more connected with the effect of a full unconditional gospel such as Paul the Apostle preached. We have seen the effect to be marvelous.

First Years of Christianity: And What Is the Church?, First Years of Christianity, The: Facts and Fruits of Paul (17:2-3)

What did Paul preach? What produced such marvelous results? Did he preach what man must do? Or did he preach what Christ had done? Did he preach baptism as a means of regeneration, or of salvation? No; baptism had no place in the gospel he preached (1 Cor. 1:17). Did he preach that all men were under the law, and that they must be justified by either keeping the law, or by someone keeping it for them, any way that they must be justified on the principle of the law? No; we do not find such a thought.

Let us keep close to the facts—his preaching as commissioned from the heavenly vision, by the Lord Himself, and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in his epistles. You will notice in his manner of preaching that there was not one word of what man was required to do. Men were treated as lost, and Paul had a message from God for them: "Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." Not a word about all men being under the law, and that Christ must needs keep it for them. The very Jews of the synagogue, who were seeking to be justified by keeping the law, needed an entire change of mind, repentance, and the facts that Paul preached produced that repentance. The mass of them rejected this gospel and these facts with scorn, just as those now who say they are Jews, that is, under law, and are not, will reject these facts of the gospel which were told out in the First Years of Christianity.

Study these three facts:

- 1) "Christ must needs have suffered";
- 2) "And risen again from the dead";
- 3) "That this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ."

These three facts formed the base or foundation of all Paul's preaching. And they were not hearsay facts; he had not been taught them by others. But he had seen this very crucified Jesus in that heavenly vision of glory above all created light.

It is no little privilege to have the true gospel thus direct from the man who received it in the heavenly vision—a man who could not be mistaken. In 1 Corinthians 15 he gives an account of the gospel he preached to them. It is as ever the same, "How that Christ died for our

sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." And that others as well as himself had seen Him after His resurrection, "So we preach, and so ye believed." If Christ was not risen, then he was a false witness, and they had believed in vain, and were still in their sins.

These were not doctrines, properly speaking, or much less theories, but simple facts. All else in the world were doctrines and theories of men. Here were facts that really revealed the righteous character of God, that met all God's claims on the guilty sinner, and gave him the absolute assurance that all was met and settled to the glory of God; for the full glory of God shone in the face of His beloved Son, the Man who had done it all, and who declared in the plainest terms that all who believed God were reckoned righteous before Him. All this was clearer and brighter than the Eastern noonday sun.

Now, is not this just what man needs to know with certainty, so that he may have perfect peace with God, in the full radiance of His glory? Perhaps nothing has more tended to hide this clear gospel of the First Years of Christianity than the Galatian heresy, the determination to put all men under law. Not the openly giving up of Christ, but making our justification to depend partly on Christ, and partly on law. Even Peter utterly failed in this matter, and the beloved Barnabas was carried away with the dissimulation.

The Spirit of God, by the Apostle Paul, takes this ground, that since Christ "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father," then to mix up the law, that is, the principle of what we ought to do to God, would be quite a different gospel from the gospel given to him (Gal. 1:4-12).

And Paul shows the real folly of this, for the Jews who were under the law had to give it up, "that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." To do it would be to build again the things which he had destroyed. As to himself, as a responsible man once under the law, he was dead, "For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ." Now a dead crucified man is not under law, but is dead to it. He says, "Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

No, nothing could be more sad or foolish than the giving up the truth as held by Paul, and set forth in this epistle. It has leavened all Christendom, and brought in the utmost confusion. Sometimes the soul believes God, and then is happy; then seeks to attain to a little more righteousness by the law as a rule of life! and then is almost in despair. Where is there one who has not suffered by this confusion? Are you perplexed, and say, "Why, I have been taught from my childhood that all men, Jews or Gentiles, were under the law, and all had transgressed it, and all were under its curse, and that even the believer is put under it again, as the rule of life"? Yes, this is exactly what men teach now. Is it what Paul taught in the First Years of Christianity?

As this letter to the Galatians was one of the very first of the first years, do prayerfully read on. What do you find in chapter 3? He tells us that Abraham was justified long before the law was given. He believed God, and IT (faith) was reckoned to him for righteousness. He tells us, "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." Then if all are now of the works of the law, all are still under the curse. He tells us that the law is not of faith. Speaking of Jews, who had been under it, he says, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."

He tells us that the covenant confirmed of God in Christ, which He promised to Abraham, was 430 years before the Law. He explains why the law was given. It served to bring out transgressions; it was a schoolmaster until Christ.

In chapter 4, there is the most marked distinction between those under law, and those under grace—the one in bondage, the other in the liberty of sons. And under the allegory of Hagar and Sarah, or Ishmael and Isaac, the two principles of Law and grace cannot go on together. Ishmael must be cast out. Oh, how we, like Abraham, plead that he might live. How we struggle that the flesh under law might live, when God tells us to reckon it dead. It seems so desirable that there might be some good found in us, and the work of Christ to make up the deficiency. To take this ground is to be in bondage. Ah, you know this, though you thus cleave to and Plead for Ishmael. Oh, that my old "I" could live and be better. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Read every word that follows in chapter 5. Remember, if you take the ground of the law, "Christ shall profit you nothing."

What solemn warnings follow, and how little heeded. The only power for a holy walk, and we need no other power, is this, the power of the Holy Spirit. And notice this mark: "But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." Then also you find the great truth, that neither the law, circumcision, nor lawlessness, uncircumcision, availeth anything, but a new creature. A truth of the utmost importance! Man must be born wholly anew. The law only brings out the sin in his nature in open transgression. This is most fully brought out in the larger letter on this subject, the Epistle to the Romans. Oh, that we could go back to the first years, and read that epistle as the very words of God. All are proved guilty—both the Gentiles, which have not the law, and the Jews, which had the law. For until the law, that is, until the time that it was given, from Adam to Moses, sin was in the world, though not reckoned as transgression.

And there is no thought in that epistle of man being justified on the principle of law. This was impossible, since man was guilty. Why should we seek to be wiser than God? He deals with the facts of man's condition. The fact was, the Gentiles without law were guilty of the grossest sins, and the Jews under the law were no better. So that the glad tidings could not be in any way what man was to God, for he was only guilty and under judgment, and had no strength to be better. God could not be righteous then in justifying the guilty on the principle of law.

Then shone out the righteousness of God in justifying the sinner, entirely apart from law, exactly as Paul had received the gospel of the heavenly vision. Jesus must suffer the atoning death of the cross. He must die for our sins. He must be delivered for our offenses, whether Jews or Gentiles. He must rise again—yes, God raised Him again for our justification. Now what had the law to do with this, or to say to this, except in the types of the sacrifices? You will thus see that both the righteousness of God in justifying, and our eternal salvation, rest not on what we must do, or law, but solely on what Jesus must do, and what He has done—done once for all, never to be repeated.

For God, who raised Him from the dead, had been glorified by His death and suffering wrath for our sins. So that God could in perfect righteousness raise Him from the dead, for the express purpose of our justification. And as the work of Christ can never lose its value for us,

we see the everlasting proof of this—Jesus in glory. The very Jesus who took the entire responsibility of our guilt and sins, is without spot in the presence of God for us. So that we are in the perfect righteousness of God, justified from all things, and forever. And forever we have peace with God. Jesus must suffer, and rise again. Jesus has suffered and risen again. This being the case, the effect of believing God in all this must be immediate forgiveness, and justification from all things. Such always was the case in the First Years of Christianity. And why not now? Repeat this verse until God gives you rest in the certainty of His Word: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Things New and Old: Volume 31, What Is Eternal Life? A Conversation on the Rails — No. 1 (13:38)

I was returning from Rochdale the other day, when I found one of my fellow-travelers was from York. He had been deeply impressed with the statements of Mr. Spurgeon, as to the unsound teaching of the present ministers of the Baptist Union, and he was afraid it was true. He said he had sat under the ministry of Mr. Parsons, of York. He asked me, “Do you not think there is a great difference between the preaching of that day and this?” I replied, “Can you find one who answers to Mr. Parsons now, amongst all the popular preachers amongst the Congregationalists of this day—to his earnest preaching of Christ, and His atoning death as the only foundation of the salvation of God?” After serious thought he said, “I do not know of one.”

I was telling him of my first preaching in the city of York, more than forty years ago, and how the Lord gave me an immense congregation in a few minutes. I was a stranger in the city, and had a few hours to wait for a train. After preaching, a man asked me a question, and as this man (Mr. L.) was well known to my fellow-traveler, he became greatly interested in what took place. Mr. L. said, “Do you mean to say that a man may know in this world that he is saved—that his sins are forgiven, and that he has eternal life?”

This question aroused intense interest in the large company listening at York. (Just at this point in our conversation, three or four very interesting men entered our carriage.) I then went on to explain how I had answered Mr. L., at York. God, in pure love to us lost sinners, gave His Son to be offered the sacrifice for sins. He having glorified God by the death of the cross, God has raised Him from the dead. And God now says, “Be it known unto you.... that through this man is preached unto you forgiveness of sins.” God means what He says; so that, if we believe what He says, then surely we do know that our sins are forgiven.

Then more, He also says, “And by him, [or in him] all that believe [or every one that believes] is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” This is a plain absolute fact. Then further, as to eternal life. Jesus says, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath eternal life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death unto life.” (Words of Jesus, John 5:24)

These and other scriptures enabled me to show that the believer knows with divine certainty that he is pardoned, justified, has eternal life, will never come into judgment for his sins, is saved, has passed from death unto life; is a new creature in Christ Jesus, justified from all things.

God only knows how many souls found blessing that day in York.

All my fellow-travelers had now become greatly interested; indeed, I really think the Spirit of God was working in their souls. At this point I said, before we go further, I should like to ask a question, and for each to give an answer to the best of his ability, and no one to be influenced by the others' answer; but each to answer deliberately for himself. All agreed to this. The question was this—what is eternal life?

No. 1, my friend of York replied, “I think that is one of those things we cannot tell, we cannot say what it is.”

No. 2, a highly intellectual, well-educated young man, said after much reflection, “I should say it is the highest faculties of man fully developed.”

No. 3, a middle-aged sober Christian man I judged, said, “I think it is the enjoyment of God.”

No. 4, a man ignorant of the grace of God, scarcely able to apprehend the question, said, “I cannot make your doctrine out; you seem to think God is as willing to pardon the greatest criminals, as better men; and that they have as good a chance to be saved as good men. How long do you make it out it would take to save a right bad man?”

I replied to No. 4, “How long do you think it took to save the dying thief?”

No. 5 declined. He could not say what eternal life was. And he was the only one who seemed not so much interested.

Last of all it was now my turn, in going round the carriage, I said, “First we must notice the difference between existing forever, and eternal life. Satan, fallen angels, demons, every unconverted man will exist forever. But they have not eternal life. Eternal life is the life of the Eternal One.” In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God..... In him WAS life....., he was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.” This is that eternal, self-subsisting Son, whom God hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds, or universe. (John 1; Heb. 1)

Here is the foundation of all truth. The Eternal Son is the eternal life, is the truth.

To No. 1. This eternal life is now fully revealed, and declared in the Son.

To No. 2. The eternal life then is not the evolution of the higher faculties of man. Satan would set before us evolution, so as by it to become God. Not so the word of God. “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God;

that ye may know that ye have eternal life.” (1 John 5:11-13.)

This young man was an Agnostic, had been leavened with infidelity by ministers and teachers! I said to him, “Young man, you are young and I am old, or getting old, old at least in the word of God. It has been my study and delight for forty-five years, and, indeed, longer than that, and I can assure you every day it becomes more dear and blest to my soul. Let me beg of you to take that word as it truly is, the word of God—God speaking to your soul.” He turned pale with emotion, and said, “Oh that I could believe as I did when a child!” God grant that the word may be blest to that young man.

To No. 3, I said, “Your answer came nearer. But eternal life is not the enjoyment of God, but that which enables us to know, and joy in God.” “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3.)

To No. 4, I said, “It is not the greatness of man’s sins but the infinite value of the atoning death of the Son of God (oh think of the infinite Creator becoming man to die for the finite creature, man). Yes, it is God’s estimate of that devoted love unto death that is the ground of forgiveness of sins unto all alike.”

All now left the carriage with hearty thanks for the conversation, except No. 5. There could what is Eternal life?

not have been a more striking contrast than there was between No. 2 The Agnostic, and No. 5.

I said then to No. 5, “I suppose you are not interested in these matters, or how a man may know that he has eternal life?” “Indeed, sir, I am greatly interested; but I felt I could not enter into the conversation.” I trust I found an open ear and open heart, to hear and believe the salvation of God.

And now, dear reader, will you go down into the dark cellar with the Agnostic, shut out every ray of light, and then say you will not believe anything you do not see? You will see neither sun, nor moon, nor stars—will your disbelieving in their existence alter the fact of their existence? No, if you shut yourself up in darkness, and unbelief, refusing every ray of inspired light in the word of God, will that alter the awful fact that, “He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him?” (John 3:36.) Oh, ye infidel ministers and professors in colleges, will your Agnostic blindness avail you in the lake of fire forever and ever? Dark and cruel is your unbelief, in leading the young to doubt, and everlasting woe. “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him.” (John 4:9.) G.S.

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