

C. R. STAM



THESSALONIANS



COMMENTARY

on

THE EPISTLES OF PAUL
TO THE THESSALONIANS

by

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PREFACE

It is with profound thanks to God that, by His grace, I have been enabled to present to our readers another book in the study of His precious Word-this time a commentary on *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*.

Though I had long recognized these epistles as *The Letters of the Blessed Hope*, it was not until I had studied more intensely in the preparation of this volume that I began to realize how consistently, clearly and emphatically these letters teach the rapture of the members of Christ's Body to be with Him *before the prophesied Tribulation begins*. We pray that this effort will bring like light and blessing to our readers.

In these days of widespread trouble and unrest, it is important to understand the distinction between our Lord's coming to take His own out of the world at the close of the dispensation of grace, and His subsequent *return to earth* to judge and reign.

In the light of I Cor. 1:26-29 I have written with the average English reader in mind. While it has sometimes been necessary, or at least helpful, to consider the sense of the Greek, I have done this only where I felt it to be fully warranted.

Since this book has been written under increased physical difficulty, I have wondered whether God will permit me to complete any further in-depth studies in the Scriptures. While soliciting the prayers of our Christian friends in this regard, I gladly leave the outcome in His wise and loving hands.

The prayer I offer most fervently now as this work goes to press, is that it will be used of God to fully prepare each reader to go to be with the Lord Jesus Christ when He comes. Thus prepared, and waiting, we shall be able to sing with Frances Bevan:

He and I, in that bright glory,
One deep joy shall share –
Mine, to be forever with Him;
His that I am there.

How blessed to know that He desires to have us with Him even more deeply than we desire to be with Him!

CORNELIUS R. STAM

Chicago, Illinois
June 1, 1984

INTRODUCTION

THESSALONICA

Thessalonica (now called Salonika) was, in Paul's day, a prominent city of Macedonia (now northern Greece), a busy seaport on the northern coast of the **Aegean Sea**. It was situated along the famous *Egnatian Way*, which connected Rome with the whole region north of the Aegean. It thus had a double geographic advantage for the spread of the gospel.

Paul's proclamation of "the gospel of the grace of God" was having a powerful impact, carrying Christianity from Asia Minor over into Europe, another continent, at a location from whence it would be further carried to **Rome** and probably Spain, in his own life-time, and then to northern Europe - *and America!*

The Apostle had travelled to Macedonia in response to a vision he had received at Troas, in which a Macedonian had prayed him, saying, "*Come over into Macedonia and help us*" (Acts 16:9). Thessalonica was the *second* city in Macedonia among whose inhabitants Paul and Silas had ministered, having first established a church at Philippi. Both cities held strategic advantages for the Apostle's ministry.

THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA

After having been "shamefully entreated" at Philippi (**I Thes. 2:2**; cf. **Acts 16:19-24**) Paul, with Silas, made his way to Thessalonica, and "as his manner was," went first to the synagogue, where for "three sabbath days¹ [he] reasoned with them out of the Scriptures," proving to them that the Jesus who had been crucified was indeed the Messiah of prophecy (**Acts 17:3** cf. **I Pet. 1:11**).

The Apostle's kinsmen at Thessalonica, however, unlike those at Berea, did not, as a whole, receive the Word with open hearts and minds. Paul's preaching rather won for him their deep and lasting enmity. Thus, unlike the "many" Jews who believed at Berea, only "some" among the Thessalonian Jews believed² - and again, in contrast to "some" of the *Jews* who believed, we read the words: "and of the devout Greeks a *great multitude*, and of the chief [i.e., distinguished] women, *not a few*" (Acts 17:4).

¹ The word "sabbath" in the New Testament is used of both the seventh *day* of the week *and* of the *week* of seven days. But the sabbath *day* would, of course, be the opportune time to find large gatherings at the synagogue. Nor does the record state that Paul ministered the word here for three sabbaths *only*. It may well be that it was only for three sabbaths that he had a free hand there *as* at the Pisidian synagogue (Acts 13:14,15). Such passages as Phil. 4:16 I Thes. 2:9 and II Thes. 3:8 appear to indicate that he labored at Thessalonica for a longer period of time.

² The Greek *epeisthesan*, from the root *peitho*, is not the usual word rendered "believe" in KJV, but is a stronger word, generally rendered "persuaded." Those who did believe at Thessalonica were not *easily* convinced.

The "devout Greeks" referred to here, were not merely devout in their own religions, for they were found in the synagogue. Rather, while not proselytes, they were God-fearing Gentiles. This being so, however, it must follow that almost immediately they, with Paul and Silas, went about winning multitudes of *pagans* to Christ, for not only is it clear that the church at Thessalonica was overwhelmingly a *Gentile* congregation when Paul wrote, but also that their number was made up overwhelmingly of those who had "turned to God *from idols*," not from Judaism ([I Thess. 1:8,9](#)). This is further confirmed by the fact that there is not even one quotation from the Old Testament to be found in the letters to the Thessalonians.

Thus the Gentiles had put the Jews to shame in their attitude toward the gospel.

Sadder still, "the Jews which believed not" were so vicious in their hatred of Paul and his co-workers that they got together with some of "the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar," nor did they hesitate to appeal against them *to Rome* (the oppressor they had themselves so long despised and detested), charging them with sedition and treason ([Acts 17:5-7](#)). Indeed, they even followed Paul to **Berea** to stir up the people there against the Apostle-and against Christ ([Acts 17:13](#)).

Thus the believers at Thessalonica were early introduced to persecution and suffering ([I Thes. 1:6](#)), and this, in turn, contributed to their spiritual growth ([II Thes. 1:3,4](#)). Thus it is that many students of the Scriptures have called the Thessalonian congregation *the model church*.

Paul's first apostolic journey had not taken him far from his headquarters at Antioch in Syria, but now, establishing churches in Europe, he could not revisit them periodically to counsel and encourage them. To this expansion of his ministry we owe his apostolic letters.

THE EPISTLES TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS

Twice at least the Apostle had tried in vain to revisit the beloved Thessalonian believers ([I Thes. 2:17,18](#)), hence these letters.

The Thessalonian epistles are the earliest of Paul's letters and the beginnings of *Christian* literature. Evidently both epistles were written from **Corinth**, for he had stopped only briefly at Berea and Athens, but spent a year and a half at Corinth ([Acts 18:11](#)). Also, Silas and Timothy, Paul's co-authors in both letters, were with him in Corinth. Indeed, the first epistle was probably written in response to news from Timothy, whom Paul had sent from Athens to encourage the persecuted Thessalonian believers ([I Thes. 3:1-7](#)).

THE BLESSED HOPE

The Thessalonian epistles reveal the early distinction between the hope of those who still expected Messiah to re turn to earth to reign after the Great Tribulation, and the *prior hope* held out to those who received Paul's message of grace. Here in his earliest epistles there is already evidence of an *interruption* in the program of prophecy, for we, God's ambassadors of "grace and peace," are to be recalled before He declares war on this Christ-rejecting world (II Cor. 5:20; I Thes. 4:16 - 5:11).

The Thessalonian epistles are properly called "The Letters of the Blessed Hope," for in them we find more allusions and direct references to the rapture of the Church than most readers have observed. In every chapter of both epistles the rapture of the members of the Body of Christ is referred to - and the coming of Christ for His own *before* the day of wrath begins is most clearly taught. This subject is not found in the Book of Acts, simply because Acts is not, as generally supposed, the story of the birth and growth of the Church of this dispensation, but the story of *the fall of Israel* (See Acts 28:25-28). But the Body of Christ is the product of the "dispensation" and the "gospel" of the grace of God proclaimed by Paul. Hence the Body will not remain in the scene upon which God's judgment is to be poured. God will not declare war upon this world without first recalling His ambassadors.

THE ORDER OF PAUL'S EPISTLES

As to the canonical order of Paul's epistles to the churches, George Williams says: "It is remarkable that in the more than 2,000 ancient MSS of the New Testament, the order of the Epistles from Romans to Thessalonians is always the same. Other books vary in order, but these never" (*The Student's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, Introduction to I Thessalonians).

This is not only remarkable; it is appropriate, for *doctrinally* Romans *should* come first, and the Thessalonian epistles last, for in Romans the great doctrines of the Christian faith are systematically set forth while in the Thessalonian epistles the subject is the catching away of the Church to be with Christ. But the Thessalonian epistles coming first *chronologically*, prove that the "blessed hope" of the rapture was vouched-safe to the Body of Christ from its earliest days, while the Apostle's last-written epistles chronologically lead us into the highest revelations of all.

THE ABIDING TRINITY

There is one more subject that should be discussed in connection with the Thessalonian epistles: their emphasis on "*the abiding trinity*" of Christian graces. In I Cor. 13 we read that with the passing of the sign gifts (Ver. 8) three things were to "abide," or remain:

"And now abideth faith, hope, charity (love), these three; and the greatest of these is charity (love)" (Ver. 13).

It was these three graces that the Apostle looked for in each one of the churches. He never asked, "How many baptized converts do you have?" or "How many of you have the sign gifts?" The program was no longer that of the so-called "great commission" with its water baptism and miraculous signs. These were gradually giving way to greater values.

Faith, hope and love are a trinity. While the Apostle may speak of any one or two, or of all three together, yet they are so wholly one that no one can exist apart from the other two. Furthermore, each is equally important in its way. *Love* is the "greatest," the *crowning* virtue. It is of *paramount* importance. Yet *faith* is of *primary* importance. Faith must come *first*, for "without faith it is impossible to please Him." And *hope*, or expectancy, is of *perpetual* importance. It lies at the center of our daily Christian experience.³

Is it not beautifully appropriate, then, that in Paul's very first epistles he emphasizes this abiding trinity more than in any of his other epistles! As the sign gifts were already disappearing he would have believers see the enduring importance of "faith, hope and love, these three."

In the opening words of his first letter to the Thessalonians the Apostle recalls their "work of *faith*," their "labor of *love*," and their "patience of *hope*" (1:3). Then he recalls how they had *turned* to God from idols: there is *faith*-"*to serve* the living and true God": there is *love*-"*and to wait* for His Son from heaven": there is *hope* (1:9,10). Indeed the whole first chapter is divided into three parts, the first having basically to do with their *faith* (Vers. 1-5), the second with their *love* (Vers. 6-8) and the third with their *hope* (Vers. 9,10).

There is more as we go through the epistle, but 5:8 urges them to "put on the breastplate of *faith* and *love*, and for an helmet, the *hope* of salvation.

In turning to the salutation to the second epistle we are refreshed to see how these believers have grown spiritually since he last wrote to them. Says the apostle:

"...your *faith* groweth exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; so that we . . . glory . . . in your patience of *faith* [there is hope!] in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure" (II Thes. 1:3,4).⁴

³ See the author's booklet, *The Abiding Trinity*.

⁴ Note that in each of these examples hope, rather than love, receives final mention - consistent with the subject of these "Letters of the Blessed Hope."

Oh, that these graces might abound in us, the members of Christ's Body today! The individual believer in whom these virtues abound has all he needs and all that God expects of him. All else is bound up in "these three." Likewise, the local church in which they abound is a *full* church, whether composed of twenty-five members or twenty-five hundred.

Sacrifices, circumcision and the law have passed away; the sign gifts have ceased,⁵ but these three graces remain as an abiding trinity and will abide to the end of the age.

⁵ In *God's* program. And human efforts to recover the Pentecostal signs are not only futile; they are illicit, and point forward to the false miracle worker of II Thes. 2:9.

Chapter I - I Thessalonians 1:1-10

PAUL AND THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS

A MODEL CHURCH

"Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;

"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;

"Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God."

I Thess. 1:1-4

THE SALUTATION

In both his letters to the Thessalonian believers Paul addresses himself to them in association with others (Silas and Timothy), nor is this unusual, but these two letters are the *only* ones in which he addresses himself to his readers merely as "Paul," with no descriptive title of any kind.

There are probably several reasons for this. Apparently there were no serious problems at Thessalonica to complicate matters, and he did not need to be cautious about the way he addressed them. No one, evidently, questioned his apostolic authority, as some did later at Corinth and the Galatian churches. There was no heresy to combat as at Colosse, nor any division as at Philippi. Moreover, Paul and the Thessalonian saints had been through much bitter persecution *together*, and this would naturally make for an intimacy between them that others might not enjoy.

As to his greeting here in I Thes. 1:1, it took many years before this writer grasped its true significance. He had thought of it only as a beautiful, spiritual salutation, while in fact it is much more than this.

These words are not only a salutation; they are an *official declaration* by Paul as an ambassador, from the rejected Father and His rejected Son. "*Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ*": This was the theme of the message he was sent to proclaim.

According to prophecy the Father was to avenge the rejection of His Son (See [Psa. 2:1-5; 110:1](#)), but in infinite grace He *interrupted* the prophetic program, delaying the judgment and ushering in "*the dispensation of the grace of God,*" offering to His enemies everywhere *an amnesty, yea "the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace"* ([Eph. 1:7](#)).

Thus the proclamation, "*Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ,*" appears in the opening words of every one of Paul's epistles signed by his name. And it is grace and peace we are still to proclaim to all men⁶.

CAUSE FOR THANKSGIVING

The Thessalonian believers had given Paul great cause for thanksgiving. They had suffered much persecution and had remained true.⁷ And here the Philippian saints deserve credit for their encouragement of the young believers, for while Paul was still with the Thessalonians, the Philippians, having heard of the persecution which they were called upon to endure, sent delegations "once and again" to help Paul, and them, in the work they were seeking to accomplish ([Phil. 4:16](#)). The Philippians too knew what persecution was; hence it must have been most heartening to the Thessalonian saints to have emissaries from Philippi appear among them now and again to help and encourage them. Thus great mutual affection between Paul and both these churches appears in his epistles to them (Cf. [Phil. 1:3-5; I Thes. 1:2-4](#)).

"*We give thanks to God always for you all.*" When the Apostle thought of them he thanked God for them - and mentioned them to God *in* his prayers, "remembering with out ceasing" their "*work of faith,*" their "*labor of love,*" and their "*patience of hope*" (Ver. 3). Indeed, it was the possession of these three Christian graces that assured him that they were truly "the elect of God"⁸ (Vers. 3,4).

THE THESSALONIAN SAINTS AND THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD

"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

"And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the Word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:

⁶ For a further discussion of this subject, see the author's commentary on *Romans*. Pp.28-30.

⁷ Thus when Luke says in Acts 17:11 that the Bereans were "more noble than those in Thessalonica," he refers to the Jews in their synagogues, not to the saints subsequently converted to Christ.

⁸ *Appendix No.11* of the author's *Commentary on Romans* deals with the subject of election.

"So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Acheia.

"For from you sounded out the Word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything.

"For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye 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.

I Thes. 1:5-10

THE POWER OF PAUL'S MESSAGE

It should be observed that there is no word here about any miracles wrought among the Thessalonians. Rather, the power manifested was that associated with the preaching of the Word, or more specifically, "the gospel of the grace of God," which Paul proclaimed.

In Ver. 5 he emphasizes, as he does in so many other places, that it was *his* gospel that had been proclaimed to them "*in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.*" This is clear evidence that Acts 17:2,3 in no wise teaches that Paul then, or ever, preached "the gospel of the kingdom." He merely proved to them that the crucified Jesus was the promised Messiah, for how could they trust Him as their Savior if they did not believe that He was Messiah but an impostor?

And now he calls *them* to record, as it were, as to his conduct among them, for he continues:

"As ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake" (Ver. 5).

This is the first of seven phrases in 1:5 to 2:11, in which he reminds them that *they know* how he conducted himself among them. In sequence they would read as follows:

"...ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. . For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain. . . But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God, with much contention . neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness. . . . For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail; far laboring night and day because we would not be chargeable to any of you, we preached unto you the gospel

of God. Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe; as ye know how we exhorted and charged every one of you as a father doth his children" (I Thess. 1:5 - 2:11).

Surely Paul and his comrades had not labored among the Thessalonians for their own advantage. The Apostle could challenge them as sincerely as he later did the Corinthian believers, when he asked them: *'Did I make a gain of you? Did Titus make a gain of you?'* (II Cor. 12:17,18). Indeed, the above passage brings to mind his words to the Ephesian elders as he challenged *them*:

"I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.

"Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands⁹ have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me" (Acts 20:33,34).

Such conduct had won great respect for Paul among those to whom he had ministered. And his words show that he realized what *disrespect* an opposite course of behavior could produce. Hence his urgent warnings to Timothy and Titus about the dangers of using the ministry for personal gain.

How sorely we need ministers of the gospel today who preach a "rightly divided" Word *"in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance"* - and whose lives bear witness to the truth of their message! How can such a ministry fail to bear fruit!

FOLLOWERS OF PAUL AND OF CHRIST

Paul alone, besides Christ, says repeatedly, *"Follow me"* (See [I Cor. 4:16](#); [11:1](#); [Phil. 3:17](#)). This is because, unlike the twelve, he represented the glorified Lord in proclaiming a *new* program and a *new* message, namely *"the dispensation of the grace of God"* ([Eph. 3:2](#)), and *"the gospel of the grace of God"* ([Acts 20:24](#)). These were committed to him "by revelation" to proclaim to others ([Eph. 3:1-3](#)).

The Thessalonian believers had become followers of Paul, and thus of the glorified Lord, in three respects, as shown in Vers. 6-8:

1. They *"received the Word"* which Paul proclaimed (See "our gospel" in Ver. 5).
2. They endured *"much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost."*
3. *They* in turn became examples of Christian faith and conduct to all the believers in Macedonia, Achaia and beyond. Of the Roman believers Paul could

⁹ We can almost see him spread forth his' hands before them.

say, "Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (Rom. 1:8), and here, to the Thessalonian saints, he could *already* say,

"For from you sounded out the Word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad, so that we need not to speak anything" (ver. 8).

Paul did not need to tell others the news about Thessalonica; on every hand *others were telling him!*

Believing in Christ and witnessing for Him was dangerous in Thessalonica in those days. Note: they had "*received the Word in much affliction*" (Ver. 6). And referring to the persecutions in Judaea, the Apostle says, "*ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen*" (2:14), and then goes on to describe the intensity of the hatred being manifested against true believers in Christ.

But this affliction and persecution did not, in fact, hinder the spread of the gospel. Often it is rather when all goes easily and well, that the saints are apt to grow complacent.

At Berea Paul's message was cautiously, then eagerly, received, with the result that "many of them believed." For their attitude toward Paul's preaching they were called "noble." They were members of God's aristocracy. Later persecution came from the outside, but it appears that they received little or no opposition to *receiving* the gospel.

By contrast the majority at Thessalonica's synagogue bitterly opposed Paul's message and viciously persecuted the minority who had accepted it as the truth of God. But the Apostle writes, "ye . . . received the Word in much affliction *with joy of the Holy Ghost*" (Ver. 6). Persecution had not destroyed this joy; it had helped to produce it (cf. Acts 5:41). And thus more was accomplished at Thessalonica, evidently, than at Berea.

The gospel may be gladly received, yet further fruit be lacking. The "noble" Bereans are barely mentioned again, while Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to encourage the persecuted believers there. Also he wrote them twice and showed great interest and concern about their sufferings and their ministry as a local church.

Here too, then, the Thessalonian believers are an important example to us. How many Christians have emerged from their church services praising the pastor for a wonderful message from the Word, but have failed to follow his example, *telling others* of the saving grace of Christ. Christ could die to bring them salvation by grace and the pastor can toil and sacrifice and suffer to proclaim it. They *enjoy* his preaching and say, "Isn't it wonderful!" but go on living for self, doing little or nothing to reach the lost for Christ.

Let each reader ask himself, What am I doing to reach others with the riches of God's grace? Is the message of grace being "sounded out" through *me*? Do you say, "But I can't preach"? Then surely you can ask God for faithfulness to *witness* to others. Are you too timid to bear *witness* to God's goodness? You can still do so by handing or sending out gospel tracts and Bible study literature. The cost for this will not be great and your life will be enriched as you *take* part in the proclamation of the message of grace.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (I Cor. 15.58).

BELIEVING, SERVING AND WAITING

"ye 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" (Vers. 9,10).

In the above passage we again find the three marks of true salvation: *faith, hope and love*. The Thessalonians, says Paul, had "*turned to God from idols*" (This is *faith*); "*to serve the living and true God*" (This is *love*); "*and to wait for His Son from heaven*" (This is *hope*). Beautiful combination: *believing, serving and waiting!*

First, the Thessalonian saints had "*turned to God from idols.*" They did not accept God as *one* of their gods, or even as the greatest of them. They "*turned to*" God - "*the living and true God*" - "*from idols.*" As they turned to Him they left their idols.

Compare this with the professing Church today. See what a mixture we have of Christianity with pagan idolatry and superstition! This condition has prevailed since an early period in the history of the Church.

The earliest believers were fiercely persecuted by the pagan world about them - and it did them good, spiritually. It made them pray more earnestly and lean more heavily upon *God*. It gave them a deeper appreciation of what they had in Christ. It kept them separate from the world. And these very persecutions made them "***strong in the Lord and in the power of His might***" (Eph. 6.10): an enormous advantage when we consider that self-confidence is nothing when compared with confidence in God.

But suddenly, in the fourth century, under the Roman Emperor Constantine, the persecution stopped. With the emperor's professed conversion to Christ paganism was only tolerated and the law commanded the propagation of the Christian religion. Thus Christianity, now popular, prevailed on every hand. Constantine showered the Christians with valuable gifts. He employed leading

Christians in government service, he gave the Christians magnificent Roman basilicas and great heathen temples with ample revenues, as meeting places. Removing the statues of Roman deities from the basilicas, he replaced them with statues of Christ and His apostles. Indeed, he favored the Christians in so many ways that it became a very popular thing to be a Christian.

But merely favoring Christianity by no means put an end to pagan idolatry and superstition. Indeed, to this day, paganism persists *in the "Church,"* especially in the Roman Catholic Church. In our own day a maximum of form and ritual and a minimum of spiritual reality prevails in the professing Church; a maximum of blind superstition and a minimum of intelligent faith, a maximum of human opinion and a minimum of the truth of God.

Under Constantine the Christians were, of course, placed in a compromising position. They *could not* speak out with the same conviction and thus lost much of the power of the Spirit in their preaching. Few indeed were the exceptions who dared to stand for the truth as representatives of *God*.

God's Law is most explicit in condemning idolatry in any form, yet many, especially in the Church of Rome, bow down reverently before images – *in the name of Christianity!* Millions, thus, are hindered from coming to *know Christ*, being "carried away unto these dumb idols."

It should be noted, however, that the Thessalonians had not been induced to turn from their idols to God. Rather they *"turned to God from idols."* Paul came to them, not preaching against idolatry, but proclaiming the wonderful "gospel of the grace of God," and as they responded and turned to God they naturally left their idols.

Don't ask a little child to give up that trinket he holds so dear. It would be a great sacrifice for him to have to do this. But offer him something *better!* Offer him a shining play truck, or some such thing, and he will drop the trinket without further consideration.

Nor are we, in preaching to the lost, trying to get them to give up their way of life. Rather we proclaim to them "the gospel of the grace of God" and faith in Christ as the One who paid the penalty for our sins. This is how men are saved, and turn to God from their idols.

"Then, knowing Him, it will be natural to desire to serve the living and true God." Paul often became weary and discouraged in his service for Christ, but he *couldn't* quit. The infinite *love of Christ* - for him and for a lost world - bore him along as resistlessly as an ocean tide. Hear his own words on the subject:

"For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God; or whether we be sober, it is for your cause,

"For the love of Christ constraineth¹⁰ us ..." (II Cor. 5:13,14).

But was it not Paul's love for Christ that "constrained" him? Ah, amply as he demonstrated his love for Christ, this was but a meager reflection of *Christ's* love for *him*, and for a lost world. Thus he says "*the love of Christ* constraineth us." And thus we say that having turned to God from idols, it is a natural thing to desire to "serve the living and true God." How sad is the lot of the millions who do "good works" to *gain* God's favor! They have it all backward:

"For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: NOT OF WORKS, lest any man should boast.

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus UNTO GOOD WORKS, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8,9).

Finally, the Apostle indicates that while the Thessalonian believers served "the living and true God," they *waited*, or kept waiting, for His Son from heaven (Ver. 10).

Chronologically this is the first written statement from the pen of Paul regarding the imminent coming of Christ for his own, and it demonstrates the fact that the rapture of the Church is part of the special message committed to him ([I Cor. 15:51,52](#)) and proclaimed by him even during his earlier ministry.

The prophets of old had predicted the return of Christ to *judge and reign*. His coming for us, however, will not be associated with judgment, but with *grace*. We will not be here when the bowls of God's wrath are poured out upon the earth, for before that time we shall have been "caught up" to be with Christ who hath "*delivered us from the wrath to come*" (Ver. 10). This very epistle clearly states that "we which are alive and remain" (i.e., until our Lord's coming for us), along with those who have been raised from the dead, will be "*caught up together ... to meet the Lord in the air*; and so shall we ever be with the Lord ([I Thes. 4:16-18](#)). *Blessed hope!*

It is this "blessed hope" we are told to "wait for" ([I Thes. 1:10](#)), and to "*look for*" ([Phil. 3:20](#); [Tit. 2:13](#)), even as we keep "*servicing* the living and true God." May God keep us faithfully "*servicing and waiting*" until our Lord comes for us!

THE POST-TRIBULATION THEORY

Since chronologically I Thes. 1:10 represents Paul's first written statement concerning the rapture of the Church to be with Christ, a further word should be said with regard to the post-tribulation view, the teaching that the rapture of the Body will not take place until *after* the Great Tribulation of prophecy.

¹⁰ The same original word is used in Luke 8:45, where we read that the multitude "thronged" our Lord.

This teaching is largely the result of a misinterpretation and misapplication of certain verses from the "Gospel" records and the book of Acts, particularly the following:

[Matt. 24:40-42](#) ("the one shall be taken and the other left.")

[Matt. 25:1-13](#) (the parable of the ten virgins.)

[John 14:3](#) ("If I go . . . I will come again, and receive you unto Myself").

[Acts 1:11](#) ("This same Jesus . . . shall so come...")

But, as we shall see, these brethren have taken their arguments for the Rapture from the *wrong* part of Scripture, for Paul distinctly declares that the truth of the Rapture was a "*mystery*," or *secret, until revealed through him*.

THE WRATH TO COME

First it should be noted that it is *in connection with the Rapture* that the Apostle refers to our Lord as the One who has "*delivered us from the wrath to come*" ([I Thes. 1:10](#)).

What is this "wrath to come" of which he speaks? Is it the Great White Throne, or the Lake of Fire? No. Read [Rev. 20:11-15](#). The emphasis there is not upon wrath, but upon the carrying out of *penal justice*.

But the Great Tribulation of prophecy is consistently and repeatedly associated with the *wrath* of God in such phrases as "*the day of His wrath*," "*the time of His wrath*," His "*fierceness and wrath*," "*the wrath to come*," etc. (See [Psa. 2:5](#); [Isa. 9:19](#); [13:9](#); [Jer. 10:10](#); [Zeph. 1:14,15](#); [Rev. 6:15-17](#); [14:10](#); [15:1](#), [16:1,19](#); [19:15](#) *et al*).

Thus the members of the Body of Christ will be "caught up" to be with Him *before* the prophesied Tribulation takes place, and it is with this fact in mind that the Apostle penned the words:

"And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."

FOUR PROPOSITIONS AND A CONCLUSION

1. Throughout Scripture Israel's hope and calling are presented as *earthly* in sphere, while the hope and calling of the Body of Christ are *heavenly* (See [Gen. 12:1-3,7](#); [Isa. 11:1-9](#); [Jer. 23:5](#); [Matt. 5:5](#); [6:10](#) and cf. [Eph. 1:3](#); [2:5,6](#); [Phil. 3:20](#); [Col. 1:5](#); [3:1-3](#)).

2. Our Lord, while on earth, was sent to none but "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (See [Matt. 15:24](#); [Rom. 15:8](#)).

3. If our Lord, while on earth, spoke to His disciples about the rapture of the Body, then the truths of the Body and its rapture to be with Christ were NOT secrets first made known to Paul - *as he says they were* (See [Eph. 3:1-11](#); [Col. 1:24-26](#); [I Cor. 15:51,52](#); [I Thes. 4:15](#)). Note: the word "mystery" (Gr., *musterion*) simply means *secret*.

4. If our Lord on earth urged His disciples to be watching and waiting for the Rapture, then the Rapture *must* take place *after* the Great Tribulation, for He also prepared them for this time of trouble (See [Matt. 24:3-21](#))

5. THEREFORE: Bible teachers who have used Scripture passages from the four Gospels and early Acts to teach the Rapture have failed to rightly divide the Word of truth and have unwittingly helped to bring about the post-tribulation theory, thus frightening sincere Christian people rather than "comforting one another" with the blessed truth that we shall be "delivered from the wrath to come" by the coming of Christ to take the members of His body out of this world (See [I Thes. 1:10](#); [4:16-18](#); [5:9-11](#)).

Chapter II - I Thessalonians 2:1-16

AN AFFECTIONATE RELATIONSHIP A MODEL MAN OF GOD

"For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain:

"But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

"For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile.

"But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

"For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness:

"Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome as the apostles of Christ.

"But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:

"So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

"For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail; for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

"Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:

"As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children.

"That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory."

I Thes. 2:1-12

As we have seen, the Thessalonian assembly is presented to us in Chapter 1 as a model church. Indeed, not one word of condemnation or reproof of these dear saints is found in this epistle. Rather, the Apostle commends them for their faith and love and hope, and rejoices that they "*turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven.*"

And now, for the moment, as we consider the first part of Chapter 2, we pass from a model church to a model man of God. As the Apostle explains *why* his entrance among the Thessalonians was not in vain, we must remember that far from boasting, he writes by divine inspiration. It is *God* telling us what kind of person Paul was. As we consider the details of I Thes. 2:1-12, therefore, let us carefully note those attributes which will make *us* representatives of God whom He can approve and commend.

At Philippi the Apostle, with Silas, had been *dragged* before the magistrates. why? Because in the name of Christ he had restored a poor demon-possessed girl to sanity - or more directly, perhaps, because her owners had seen that with her restoration to normalcy, "*the hope of their gains was gone*" ([Acts 16:19](#)).

Next, the magistrates, yielding to the general uprising, tore off the apostles' clothes and commanded the lictors to beat them (Ver. 22). "And when they had laid *many stripes* upon them" they "*cast*" them into prison, and the jailor "*thrust*" them into a dungeon,¹¹ making their feet fast in stocks (Ver. 24).¹²

What cruel, unreasonable treatment! To all of us who have suffered so little for Christ, and have sometimes complained so much, the Apostle presents the challenge, "*Who is offended, and I burn not?*" (II Cor. 11:29). And thus Ver. 2 of our passage begins:

"But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi..."

How impressive, against this background, is the rest of the passage! As we consider it in detail let us ask God to help us to measure up.

1. Note the Apostle's *audacity* as a representative of the glorified Lord (Vers. 1,2).

He had no mere opinions to advance. He proclaimed with deep conviction the message which His Lord had committed to Him, and this in the face of bitter opposition. Let unbelievers persecute him in one city; he will try in another. Not that he was bold *by nature*. A dozen Scripture passages tell us the opposite. Rather, as

¹¹ Ver. 29, note, the jailor "*sprang in.*"

¹² We deal more fully with the historical account in our *Acts, Dispensationally Considered*, Vol.111, Pp. 52-55.

he testifies, "We were bold *in our God*." And thus he exhorts other believers: "Be strong *in the Lord, and in the power of His might*" (Eph. 6:10).

Oh, that more of us were so deeply convicted of the truth and the importance of our God-given message, and so conscious of God's presence to help, that we would proclaim the Word of His grace utterly regardless of the cost.

2. Note the Apostle's *fidelity* to God and the truth (Vers. 3,4).

One who had already shown such fidelity as Paul had shown - and under such stress - would not now be apt to descend to deceit, impurity or guile. His own words, both here and elsewhere, however, give us the clearest light on this subject:

I Thes. 2:4: "But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts."

Gal. 1:10: "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."

II Cor. 4:1,2: "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

"But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

3. Note his *sincerity* (Vers. 5,6).

He did not flatter men to "win votes" or make himself popular with them. Nor was there any facade to cover a covetous spirit. Nor again, did he seek glory, though as an apostle of Christ he might have made himself burdensome to them, asserting his authority, demanding this and that and expecting special attention. But "importance" was not one of Paul's traits.

4. Note his *sympathy* (Vers. 7,11).

Where the truth of God's Word was concerned he could, by God's grace, be bold as a lion, but in his dealings with these new converts he was gentle as a lamb.¹³ He was both a father and a mother to them.

"We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children" (Ver. 7).

¹³ Here Martin Luther was a worthy follower of Paul: bold in the Lord where the truth was concerned, yet the writer of that touching little hymn: *'Away in a Manger'*

This word "nurse" (Gr., *trophos*), occurs only once in Scripture, so that the question arises whether the apostle refers to a nurse and the children committed to her care, or to a nursing mother and her children. We believe the latter is the true sense for two reasons: (1) The word *trophos* means *nourisher*. (2) The word "her" in the Greek is clearly "her own."

As a mother not only imparts all kinds of blessings upon her children, but would be willing even to give her life for them, so Paul, not only gladly imparted the gospel to the Thessalonians, but was willing even to give his life¹⁴ for them, "because," he says, "*ye were dear unto us,*" (Ver. 8). Or, as he puts it at the beginning of the verse, he was "*affectionately desirous*" of them.

Verses 9 and 10 appear to continue this theme. As a mother will labor and suffer night and day for her children, without expecting anything from them in return, and as she will seek to be a good example to them, so did Paul behave himself among the Thessalonian believers (Vers. 9,10).

And not only was he a mother to them; he was a *father* to them too (Vers. 11,12), "exhorting" and "comforting" (or encouraging), and sometimes "charging" them, "as a father doth his children."

"That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His kingdom¹⁵ and glory" (Ver. 12).

CONVERSION, PERSECUTION AND DIVINE JUSTICE

"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 a' it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

"For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus; far ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:

"Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:

"Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost."

¹⁴ The *King James Version* renders the Greek *psuche* both "soul" and "life."

¹⁵ Always remember that the kingdom is now vested in *Christ*, at the Father's right hand. He, though now exiled, is the rightful King. It is not to Jews, but to Gentiles in the flesh, that Paul writes.. "[God] *hath delivered us from the power of dark ness, and bath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son: In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins*" (Col. 1:13,14).

THE THESSALONIANS' CONVERSION

This is not the only occasion upon which the Apostle declares that he thanks God "without ceasing" for those who have come to know Christ. Those who seek to be faithful in witnessing for Christ know what he means, for there are those in whose conversion they, perhaps, have had a part and whose very presence now gives them great joy. The winning of souls to Christ is a most rewarding occupation.

Our Lord suffered and died to "bring many sons unto glory" ([Heb. 2:10](#)) and will one day be able to say with joy: "*Behold I, and the children which God hath given Me*" (Ver. 13). Paul too, in a lesser way, will one day be able to say the same, for soul-winning brings rich reward, not only in this life, but also in the life to come. Two Old Testament passages, Prov. 11:30 and Dan. 12:3, confirm this principle:

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise."

"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

But in particular the Apostle rejoiced that when these Thessalonians received the Word which he preached, they received it not as the word of men-men who might, perhaps, present better arguments than others - but "as it is *in truth, the Word of God*" (Ver. 13).

We doubt not that the deep conviction with which Paul preached (Ver. 2) was used of God to bring about this result. (Cf. [Acts 14:1](#)). But note well, *it was the Word of God that wrought their salvation*: "It is in truth the Word of God, *which effectually worketh also in you that believe,*" says the Apostle.

How this refutes the idea, erroneously taken from Eph. 2:8, that God arbitrarily injects or imparts faith into the hearts of those He would save. These Thessalonians *heard the Word*, which Paul preached and, being convicted by it, received it as *the Word of God* and *this* wrought their salvation. *The Word*, of which the Holy Spirit is the Author, is the "*incorruptible seed*" that brings forth life.

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (I Pet. 1:23).

"So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

Thus the Spirit does not arbitrarily and directly *inject* faith into the heart to *cause* a person to believe. It is rather as *the living Word* (the Holy Spirit being the author) takes root in the heart and is received as the truth of God, that it brings forth fruit unto salvation. Hence the exhortation of James 1:21: "*Receive with meekness the engrafted [or implanted] Word, which is able to save your souls.*"

But does not Acts 16:14,15 teach that the Lord opened Lydia's heart so that she attended to the words spoken by *Paul*? Yes, but *Lydia* was one of the women who had gathered at the riverside to *pray*, and now *providentially*, by the coming of Paul and his teaching of the Word, her heart was opened to receive it.

So far from *God directly injecting faith* into the hearts of *certain* people to *cause* them to receive His Word, so that without this special work they *cannot* believe, the very opposite is the case, for unbelievers are condemned on the most reasonable basis: "*because they received not the love of the truth THAT THEY MIGHT BE SAVED*" (II Thes. 2:10).

To return to our text, it was as the Thessalonians received Paul's message as the Word of God, that it wrought effectually in them and saved them. Greece had its great philosophers, but which of *their* writings ever saved sinners from death and destruction and imparted eternal life to them? Hence Paul's mighty challenge of I Cor. 1:20,21:

"Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"

"For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

THEIR PERSECUTION

The genuineness of the Thessalonian believers' faith reflected that of Paul's, and they demonstrated their faith as he did his.

"Ye . . . received the Word in much affliction," he says, and became "examples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia" (I Thes. 1:6,7).

"For ye, brethren ... have suffered like things of your own country men, even as [the Judaeans] have of the Jews" (2:14).

In the nature of the case, the unbelieving world hates Christ, and the Thessalonian believers had already begun to find this out. The Thessalonians had suffered persecution from their own countrymen, even as the churches of Judaea had of theirs.¹⁶

¹⁶ Another indication that the Thessalonian church was made up predominantly of Gentiles in the flesh.

But it was generally the Jewish unbelievers who stirred up the Gentiles against the Gentile believers. At **Philippi**, it appears, the persecution arose directly from the pagan owners of the demon-possessed girl. But at Thessalonica it was the Jews who "set all the city on an uproar" charging the believers with violating Caesar's laws (**Acts 17:5-7**). Again at Berea it was the Jews from Thessalonica who "came thither also" and stirred up the people against Paul (**Acts 17:13**).

Nor did this begin at Thessalonica. In Acts 13 we have one of those story-types with which the book of Acts abounds. It is a deeply significant account of two Pauls, of a Gentile who desired to hear the Word of God and a Jew who sought to keep it from him - and of a Gentile who was saved because a Jew was blinded.

It happened at Paphos, evidently the seat of government on the Island of **Cyprus**. In this city lived Sergius Paul,¹⁷ the governor of the island. This Sergius Paul had as his adviser a Jew named Bar-jesus (**Acts 13:6,7**). This in itself is significant, for the Gentiles *should* have received help and light from the Jews, and Sergius Paul was a Roman deputy, a proconsul, representing the Gentile world, while Bar-jesus (Lit., *Son of Jehovah-Savior*) was a prophet, aptly representing Israel.

But Israel did *not* bring light and salvation to the Gentile - indeed, even sought to keep it from them, and in the light of this fact the story becomes all the more significant.

Bar-jesus, though probably born of pious parents (to have been so named) had become a sorcerer, a *false* prophet. Sergius Paul, on the other hand, is said to have been "a prudent man," and he was indeed prudent in calling upon Barnabas and Saul to teach him the Word of God (*Ibid*).

But when Bar-jesus, or Elyinas (Lit., *The Knowing One*) learned of the governor's interest in the Word of God, he realized immediately that his own influence over Sergius Paulus was being threatened. Thus he "withstood" Barnabas and Saul, "seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith" (Ver. 8).

Showing up the deceiver for what he was, Paul pronounced judgment upon him. Calling the supposed "Son of Jehovah-Savior" a "son of the devil," and charging the trusted adviser with being "full of all subtilty and all mischief," the Apostle demanded: "Wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" adding, '*And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season*' (Vers. 9-11).

¹⁷ The names *Paulus* and *Paul* are the same. The Greek, like some other languages, sometimes employs the masculine suffix, sometimes not. Thus Timothy is sometimes *Timotheus*; Mark, *Marcus* and Luke, *Lucas*. This may throw light upon Acts 13:9. We agree that the word "also" there indicates that Saul's Roman name was Paul, rather than that he *began* to be called Paul at this time. But the "also" here may as well refer back to Sergius Paul, calling attention to the fact that Saul was named Paul too.

As a result Sergius Paul, the Roman deputy, "*when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord*" (Ver. 12).

But all this was only typical of what was soon to happen on a much larger scale.

In this same chapter of Acts we find the Gentiles asking to hear the Word of God ([Acts 13:42](#)) and the Jews, who should themselves have been the instruments of Gentile blessing, withstanding Paul and Barnabas.

"Almost the whole city [had come] together to hear the Word of God" (Ver. 44), but as Elymas had sought to "turn away the deputy from the faith" at Paphos, so now at Antioch the Jews, "filled with envy . . . *spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming*" (Ver. 45).

DIVINE JUDGMENT UPON THE PERSECUTORS

Thus, like Elymas, or Bar-jesus, Israel, the supposed Son of Jehovah-Savior, and God's appointed prophet to the Gentiles, is found instead to be a false prophet, a "child of the devil," opposing the truth of God, and is given up to judgment, while the Gentiles rejoice in the truth. In his indictment of Israel the Apostle says:

"[They] both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets,¹⁸ and have persecuted US; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men.¹⁹

"Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" (I Thes. 2:15,16).

Two facts are often overlooked in this connection, however: First, Elymas was blinded only "for a season" ([Acts 13:11](#)). This too was typical, for in Rom. 11:25 we read that "blindness in part is happened to Israel" only "*until* the fulness of the Gentiles be come in."²⁰ Then "all Israel shall be saved, as it is written" ([Rom. 11:25,26](#)).

Second, Verse 16 of our passage refutes the error that Paul's special message was not proclaimed until at or after Acts 28, and that Israel was not "cast out" until Paul's arrival at Rome. The tense in Acts 28:28 ("is," in the Greek there, has the sense of "has been"), and the statement here in I Thes. 2:16 that "the wrath is (Lit., has) come upon them to the uttermost," along with Paul's words in Rom. 11:15, confirm Sir Robert Anderson's contention that the "secret crisis"

¹⁸ See Luke 13:34; Acts 7:52.

¹⁹ Had not God intervened in grace, they would have *prevented* the Gentile world from receiving the blessings they should have *conveyed* to them. (See Gen. 22:18).

²⁰ The above exposition of the story of Bar-jesus, or Elymas, is taken in substance from the author's *Acts, Dispensationally Considered*, Vol.11.

between Israel and her Messiah, was reached at the stoning of Stephen -in response to which God raised up *another apostle*, sending him forth to usher in a new dispensation and to proclaim a new message, not to nations, as such, or to *the nation* (Israel), but to poor lost sinners everywhere (Rom. 11:32; Eph. 3:1-3; Acts 20:24). Thus were Israel - and the nations (See Gen. 11), cast out into the arms of grace! The glad message now is:

"...there is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:22,23).

"...there is no difference.... for THE SAME LORD OVER ALL IS RICH UNTO ALL THAT CALL UPON HIM.

"FOR WHOSOEVER SHALL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED" (Rom. 10:12,13).

"For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, THAT HE MIGHT HAVE MERCY UPON ALL.

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! (Rom. 11:32,33).

Finally, in the study of this passage we have come into contact with much opposition to the truth. Elymas seeks to turn away the proconsul from the faith (Acts 13:8), the Jews at Pisidian Antioch speak against those things which are spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming (Ver. 45). Here in I Thes. 2:15,16, we find the Jews, after bitter persecution of their own prophets and their own Messiah, persecuting Paul and "forbidding [him] to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved."

We, in America, have suffered little such persecution today. We still have a remarkable degree of freedom to preach the gospel. Ah, but what good does this freedom do if *indifference* closes our hearts and our mouths and our purses? Of what value is this freedom if we allow Satan to use affluence, worldly pleasure, business interests, or any selfish thing whatsoever, to keep us from reaching out to others with the only message that can save them from sin and its consequences? Who knows, perhaps if we *were* persecuted, bitterly persecuted, for making the gospel known, we might begin to appreciate more deeply the love of God and the riches of His grace - and to act accordingly. May God help us to awaken from our sleep lest we lose our God-given liberties and our opportunities to proclaim His grace.

Chapter III - I Thessalonians 2:17- 3:13

A PERSECUTED CHURCH AND AN ANXIOUS APOSTLE

PAUL BEREAVED OF HIS LOVED ONES

"But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time, in presence, not in heart, endeavored the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

"wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.

"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?

"For ye are our glory and joy."

I Thes. 2:17-20

The opposition which the Apostle was even now enduring at Corinth had not lessened his anxiety over his persecuted brethren at Thessalonica. The past months had been a period of intense persecution for himself and for those he had left behind in city after city. At Philippi he and Silas had been cruelly beaten and jailed and then ordered to leave the city-leaving behind them a newly-founded church which they were not even permitted to encourage by their presence. At Thessalonica, where they had gone next, great numbers were converted to Christ, but the opposition against Paul was so bitter that he and Silas barely escaped with their lives, leaving behind them another persecuted church. Arriving next at Berea, many were again won to Christ, but the unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica had pursued Paul, stirring up much opposition, so that again he barely escaped with his life, this time, however, leaving Silas and Timothy behind to encourage the brethren in this, the *third* persecuted church.

The words "taken from" (Lit., *bereaved*), in 2:17, emphasize the fact that he had not wanted to leave them. The brethren had *sent him away with haste* ([Acts 17:10](#)), realizing that if he were slain the cause of Christ would lose its most important leader.

But his heart was still with them, so much so that he "*endeavored the more earnestly*" to see their faces again (2:17); he *tried hard* to get back to them, but every time he tried *Satan hindered him* (2:18). As he had been "taken away" from them, so he was "hindered" from returning to them by bitter, relentless, Satanic opposition.

It was at Athens that he and his message were ridiculed from the beginning, though evidently not opposed, so that, providentially, he could send Timothy back to Thessalonica to help and encourage the saints there.¹

This turn of events was providential, we say, for twice the Apostle says, with regard to his concern for the Thessalonian believers, that he "couldn't bear it any longer" (3:1-5).

The fact that Satan hindered Paul from returning to Thessalonica, however, by no means indicates that Satan has equal or greater power than God, for this too was *providential*. God willed to permit it, evidently, for the strengthening of the saints there, for their intense persecutions did indeed strengthen their faith (II Thes. 1:3,4). God knew better than Paul what would strengthen the Thessalonians spiritually. We should remember this when God permits Satan to buffet us. (See Rom. 5:3-5).

THE APOSTLE'S CROWN OF REJOICING

I Thes. 2:19,20 appears to be the only passage which indicates dearly that at the coming of Christ we believers will rejoice over other believers whom, by God's grace, we have led to Christ,² or have helped spiritually, even if only in an indirect way.

In Phil. 4:1 the Apostle writes of the Philippian saints as "*my joy and crown,*" but *here* 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?"

"For ye are our glory and joy."

This stands to reason, for what faithful believer does not rejoice here and now at even the thought of believers he has led to Christ, or has been able to help spiritually? How much more will this be so "in the presence of Christ, at His coming!"

One day our Lord, having brought "many sons unto glory," will be able to say with rejoicing, "*Behold I, and the children which God hath given Me*" (Heb. 2:10,13). He, of course, was "the captain of their salvation." He poured out His life's blood to redeem them. Thus it is fitting that in recognition He should be "crowned with glory and honor" (Heb. 2:9). But those to whom, by God's grace, we have brought light and blessing, will as surely be *our* "crown of rejoicing" in "that day." *He* died to save them and to bless them with "all spiritual blessings," and by grace

¹ By now Timothy had evidently caught up with Paul again. See Acts 17:14,15. cf., I Thes. 3:1,5 (Note the "we" of Ver. 1 and the "I" of Ver. 5.)

² Dan. 12:3 teaches a similar truth but stands in a rather different category.

we have been privileged to convey to them this glorious message of salvation by grace and its "all spiritual blessings."

The Apostle declares that one day our Lord shall "*come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe,*" and then adds parenthetically, "*(because our testimony among you was believed)*" (II Thes. 1:10). May our witness thus contribute to our Lord's everlasting glory.

Those who hold a one-sided view of election should pause to read all of the above passages most thoughtfully and prayerfully. The chorus of C. C. Luther's hymn³ is pertinent here:

Must I go, and empty-handed?
Must I meet my Savior so?
Not one soul with which to greet Him?
Must I empty-handed go?

But the other side of this important subject was beautifully expressed by Samuel Rutherford:

Oh, if one soul from Anwoth
Meet me at that strand,
My heav'n will be two heav'ns
In "Immanuel's Land."

The word "coming," (Gr., *parousia*), here in I Thes. 2:19, is used with respect to *both* our Lord's coming for us and of His return to earth. It is rendered both "coming" and "presence" in KJV, thus here, surely, it refers, not so much to His journey, as to His *arrival*. We have this distinction in English too. Jane may say to her guests: "Steve is coming," meaning that he is planning to come, or that he is on his way here. But Jane may also say, "Ruth's coming meant a lot to me," referring to her arrival or her presence.

Here the Apostle evidently refers to our Lord's *arrival* to receive us to Himself, one meeting Satan cannot hinder (I Thes. 4:16-18)!

HELP SENT

"Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;

"And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlaborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:

³ The interesting details surrounding the writing of this hymn may be found in *Al Smith's Treasury of Hymn Histories*, P.42.

"That no man should be moved by these afflictions, for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.

"For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it come to pass, and ye know.

"For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain.

I Thes. 3:1-5

Paul's decision to send Timothy to **Thessalonica** and to remain at **Athens** alone himself was no small tribute to his character.

Athens was an idol-ridden city, thus filled with all the superstition and fear of paganism. The true God was not exactly crowded out, for there *was* a synagogue, but [Acts 17:16,17](#) explains that when Paul "saw the city wholly given to idolatry" he *"therefore disputed ... in the synagogue with the Jews."*

As we know, it was the Apostle's custom to go first to the Jewish synagogue in city after city, but in this case there was the greater reason for doing so. The Jews were obviously doing little to bring the heathen about them into the knowledge of the true God. Rather, evidently, the reverse was true. They, it appears, were the prime examples of the truth of Rom. 2:24: *"The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you."*

But the Apostle did not merely dispute with the Jews in the synagogue. Rather he went out to do for the benighted pagans what the Jews *could not* have done, preaching Christ to them. The record in Acts 17:16,17 states that he "disputed ... with the Jews, and with the devout persons, *and in the market daily,*" where the Athenians gathered, not only to buy and sell, but to argue their various philosophies. Think of it! Athens, the world's great seat of intellectualism, also *the center of idolatry with all its superstition and fear*, not to mention the excesses of immorality and vice which have degraded the devotees of so many pagan religions. What a testimony to the folly and futility of "the wisdom of this world." James rightly says that the wisdom that "descendeth not from above . . . is *earthly, sensual, devilish*" ([James 3:15](#)).

With all their vaunted wisdom the Athenians could not even settle on a god! One worshipped this "deity" and another that. Most worshipped different gods on different occasions. So great was the confusion that Pliny says that in Nero's time Athens contained over 3,000 public idols in addition to countless idols possessed by individuals. Petronius says (perhaps in humor) that it was easier to find a god in Athens than a man (Sat. XVII), and as we have seen from the Scripture record, the city was literally crowded with idols and altars to false gods, many of them but evidences to the low moral level to which Athens' wisdom had let her sink.

And here Paul, a servant of *God* and an apostle of Jesus Christ; Paul, who loved the Word of God and loathed idolatry and who lived morally "in all good conscience," had decided to remain here *alone*⁴ so that he might send Timothy to help and encourage the saints at Thessalonica.⁵

It is significant that Athens' "learned" men, who could not even agree as to their gods, would not listen to Paul's "words of truth and soberness," but ridiculed him, while someone on the platform pulled his coat, as it were, and said, "That was fine; we'll hear you again sometime." Thus "*Paul departed from among them.*" The "intellectuals" generally know too much to be interested in that which is most vitally and urgently important.

Ah, but the situation at Thessalonica was altogether different. There were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ with their feet planted firmly on the Word of God. As a result they were hated and persecuted, but now Paul had sent Timothy, a well-tested man of God, a "good soldier of Jesus Christ," and one whom they knew, to encourage them. Paul calls him "*our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow-laborer in the gospel of Christ,*" sent "*to establish you, and to comfort [Lit., encourage] you concerning your faith*" (Ver. 2).

It was well that such a seasoned soldier should be sent, for he was to tell them not to be "moved by these afflictions," since *they had known* that "we are *appointed* thereunto" (Ver. 3). Like a wise and faithful commander of an army Paul had forewarned them that soldiers must be ready to endure affliction (Ver. 4), not, in this case, fighting back with physical weapons, but with "the Sword of the Spirit," the Word of God. Thus like Timothy himself; they must be "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus," ready to "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ" (II Tim. 2.1,3).

Yet, the Thessalonian believers were still young in Christ and the Apostle well knew that Satan would seek to discourage them. Thus he sent Timothy back to them-at great cost to himself - lest Satan, that old Tempter, tempt them to give up the battle and all the Apostle's labor should "be in vain." Not that the precious souls saved there could be lost again. By no means! Rather his thought was that a great work for God had been established there. A "great multitude" had come to rejoice in Christ. Now he didn't want this "grace movement" to come to naught because of the fear of persecution.

Before leaving this passage we must not fail to learn the lesson God has here for us. Paul had forewarned the Thessalonian saints of persecution because he knew that "*all* who will live godly in Christ Jesus *shall* suffer persecution" (II Tim. 3:12).

⁴ I.e., alone as far as the presence of any of his associates or helpers was concerned, for there had been certain men who had believed through his message on Mars Hill and had clung to him (Acts 17:34).

⁵ Acts 17:15 is no contradiction. Ver. 16 explains. It was after Paul's discourse at Mars Hill that Timothy was evidently reunited with him again and *then* sent back to the Thessalonians.

All may not suffer *physical* persecution, for Satan uses various means to discourage us. Sometimes it is indeed physical in nature, but often also that icy stare, that cold shoulder, the silent boycott, ridicule, gossip, etc. To Paul it was doubtless difficult to bear the ridicule and indifference he encountered at Athens - more difficult, perhaps, than physical suffering had been.

The point is that "*all* who will [i.e., will to] live godly in Christ Jesus SHALL suffer persecution," and those who are not "partakers of the afflictions of the gospel" should ask themselves what is wrong, and should seek grace to witness faithfully for Christ without fear (II Tim. 1:7,8). The suffering encountered will be but a small temporal price to pay when compared with that glorious "crown of rejoicing": seeing others come to rejoice in Christ, and finally seeing them there *with Christ* because we witnessed to them of His saving grace.

GOOD NEWS!

"But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you:

"Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith:

"For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.

"For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the lay wherewith we lay for your sakes before our God;

"Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

"Now God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.

"And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:

"To the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints."

I Thes. 3:6-13

Before we consider the details of this passage we should recall that the Apostle was now at Corinth, from whence he wrote this epistle. Here too he suffered grievous persecution. Indeed, the persecution was probably still raging as he wrote (3;7).

Corinth was a large city with *two* seaports, one on either side of the narrow isthmus on which it was situated. Thus merchants, traders, sailors and travelers of all kinds, crossing the isthmus, would stop at Corinth for business or for pleasure, for Corinth was the sports capitol of the world, with its great *Isthmian Games* attracting visitors from far and near.

With its extraordinary commercial advantages and the constant flow of traffic from east to west and vice versa, **Corinth** would also be a strategic location for the spread of the gospel. Thus Paul, evidently from the beginning, planned to stay for some time.

Acts 18:1-3 tells how the Apostle secured work⁶ as a tentmaker with Aquila and Priscilla and spent sabbath days at the synagogue, proving to the Jews there that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 18:4,5). With this he would have to start for, as we have intimated, how could they accept the message of grace if they still considered the crucified Jesus an impostor?

The record states, however, that at length *"they opposed themselves and blasphemed"* (Acts 18:6). Thus began a mighty work among the Gentiles - and bitter persecution from the unbelieving Jews (Ver. 12). Looking back, the Apostle later wrote to the Corinthian believers, *"I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling"* (I Cor. 2:3). So intense was the persecution that the Lord appeared to Paul in a vision to encourage him, saying,

"Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:

"For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city" (Acts 18:9, 10).

With this encouragement "he continued there a year and six months" (Ver. 11).

Yet with all this toil and anxiety and contention he did not forget the Thessalonian believers, who were still suffering intense persecution. His anxiety over their welfare was greatly relieved, however, by Timothy's report and, while Paul himself was surrounded by opposition and persecution he directly followed up Timothy's good news with a letter of encouragement to them: the one we are studying.

⁶ Here the word "found" in Acts 18:2 may be significant. We know that at Thessalonica the Apostle had labored night and day that he might not be chargeable to any of them (I Thes. 2:9) and we know too that his trade was tentmaking, thus it is possible that some tentmaker at Thessalonica had informed him about Aquila and Priscilla. At any rate, it appears from Acts 18:2 that he was seeking employment, his first care that he might not be dependent, financially, upon any to whom he might minister. This self-reliance on Paul's part should be an example to every man of God.

Imagine how it must have cheered Paul's heart to hear from Timothy's lips the good news of the Thessalonians' faith and love, and their earnest desire *to see him again*. As he mentions this last he is quick to add, "*as we also to see you*" (1 [Thes. 3:6](#)).

Also, their faith had encouraged him, not only with regard to themselves; it had encouraged him also where his own "affliction and distress" were concerned. Read it carefully:

"Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith" (Ver. 7).

The Apostle has much to say about standing fast in his epistles, but Verse 8 deserves special notice where such "standing" is concerned.

"For now we live," he says, *"if ye stand fast in the Lord."*

He had gone through much suffering and anxiety for many months now, but the good news from Thessalonica, where persecution also raged, had given him new heart and courage. The words "we live" have the sense of the words, "*Now this is living!*" coming from the lips of one who has suddenly come from difficult times into a better, happier way of life. "Now we live," says the Apostle, "if ye stand fast in the Lord." Their firm stand had been a refreshing relief to him.

Note the words, "*in the Lord*" also. To others he writes, "Stand fast in the faith," "Stand fast in [your] liberty," "Stand fast in one spirit," etc., but here, as to the persecuted Philippians, he encourages the Thessalonians to "stand fast *in the Lord*." Mark well, he does not say, "Stand fast *for* the Lord," but "*in* the Lord." We must all learn this lesson where standing is concerned. By grace we believers have been given a position *in Christ*: "accepted" *in Christ* ([Eph. 1:6](#)), pronounced "complete" *in Christ* (Col. 2:10), blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies *in Christ* ([Eph. 1:3](#)). *All we have, we have in Christ*; all we are, we are *in Him*. Now, says the Apostle by the Spirit, *take your stand in Christ*. When the world opposes, when the flesh tempts, when Satan oppresses, and doubts arise, remember God sees you "in Christ," His beloved Son, and since He has graciously given you this position, by all means *occupy it, enjoy it*, by faith. Here is where we must begin the Christian life and continue it until we go to be with Christ, for to the Philippian saints, who had served the Lord for many years, he also writes:

"Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved" (Phil. 4:1).

Thus to babes in Christ who may read this book, and to all God's people, we say, Remember this one thing, and never forget it: God has made you to be *accepted in the Beloved*; He has pronounced you *complete in Him*. *In Christ* you have been crucified, buried, raised from the dead and exalted to God's right hand in heaven, there to be blessed with all spiritual blessings. *Occupy* your God-given

position by faith; ever take your stand *in Christ* and blessing and victory are yours. It was Paul's great joy to hear that the Thessalonian believers were thus standing fast in the Lord. See how he rejoices.

"For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God" (Ver. 9).

Yet, there was much still to be learned, for he continues:

"Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith" (Ver. 10).

It is as if he said: "Hallelujah! The first step has been taken. They are standing fast in Christ. Now I pray that I may be given the opportunity to teach them those things they still need to learn."

MORE TEACHING NEEDED

But what, exactly, was lacking in their faith? What partly-known truth was it that the Apostle desired to "perfect" for them? for he appears to have some special subject in mind.

We believe that, in the main, it concerned the pretribulation coming of Christ for His own. II Thes. 2:1-5 exhorts these Thessalonian believers not to be "shaken" by any rumor that the Day of the Lord was at hand, for this could not yet be,⁷ and then he adds: "*Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?*" (Ver. 5) Thus they had discussed the coming of the Lord when he was with them, but this is a voluminous subject, and they had not yet come to understand all its ramifications.

At the time of Paul's writing of I Thessalonians they were evidently confused and concerned about their saved loved ones who had departed this life. Would they miss the joy of the Rapture? This question urgently needed to be answered for them, so he does so in Chapter 4, Verses 13-18 of this letter.

But there was so much more, and the Apostle earnestly prayed that soon he might see them again to explain all these things and strengthen their faith. As we have said, much of both these epistles is devoted to the truth of the Lord's coming for His own, but Paul would so much rather be with them to explain the details of this special "hope" for the members of Christ's Body. Thus his prayer: "*Now God Himself. . . and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you*" (Ver. 11).⁸

⁷ II Thes. 2:1-5 is one of the strongest arguments for the pre-tribulation rapture of the church, but we forbear to discuss it until we reach the passage in the regular course of our commentary.

⁸ What a large-hearted person Paul was! To the Romans he writes, "*I long to see you*" (1:11), and expresses his "*great desire to come unto you* (15:23). To the Galatians: "*I desire to be present with you*" (Gal. 4:20). To the Philippians: "*How greatly I long after you*" (Phil. 1:8), calling them "*dearly beloved and longed for*" (4:1), And to the Thessalonians: "*Night and day praying exceeding that we might see your face*" (I Thes. 3:10).

Finally, he exhorts them as to the love which all believers should feel toward each other "and toward all men" (I Thes. 3:12). The Apostle Paul, like our Lord on earth, had much to say about love. Here he expresses his desire that their love toward each other and toward all, may "increase and abound," as his love toward them had increased with the intensity of their persecutions.

"To the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (Ver. 13).

The word "holiness" is important here, for it means "separation to, as sacred," and God would have us to be separated to Him in the most sacred of bonds, and would have this manifested at our Lord's coming for us.

But how can His coming *for* us be "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ *with* all His saints"? The answer is again found in the simple fact that the word *parousia* (rendered by KJV both as "coming" and "presence") refers here to His "*presence... with all His saints.*" Thus we find a further reference to the rapture of the members of the Body of Christ to be with Him.

Chapter IV - I Thessalonians 4:1-12

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

"YOUR SANCTIFICATION"

"Furthermore, then, we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

"For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.

"That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor;

"Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:

"That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

"For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

"He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us His holy Spirit."

--- I Thes. 4:1-8

It is a well-known fact that in the epistles of Paul, doctrinal teaching is generally, or always, followed with practical application. Here, in I Thessalonians, this is so too, but with a variation. In Chapters 1-3 he teaches important doctrines by recalling his ministry among them and God's work in them. Then follows the practical application, but *then* an extensive passage on the Lord's coming, followed by a closing exhortation. Why this variation? Does it not follow the general divisions of I and II Thessalonians into *faith, love, and hope*, in that order? In Chapters 1-3 he recalls how the work at Thessalonica began as in faith the Thessalonians not only *turned* to Christ, but *stood fast* in Him. Then, in Chapter 4, the subject is *love*, even their sanctification to God. This in turn is followed by a section on the coming of Christ for His own, our "blessed hope."

Thus we now enter the practical section of I Thessalonians, and we may be assured that it is as much the Word of God to us as is any other part of Paul's epistles.

Many Christians love to study the great doctrines of the Bible and delight in dispensational truth; the Bible has come to mean so much more to them since they have learned to "rightly divide" it. But some of these same people are not nearly so eager to have these great truths applied to their lives. They do not wish to have their conduct discussed.

Yet, as we have seen, consistently in Paul's epistles he follows his great teachings with exhortations regarding the practical application of these teachings. Indeed, what good is it to understand the great doctrines of Scripture, and its dispensational divisions, if we do not *live* by them; if they have no effect upon our daily lives?

Thus the Apostle opens this section of his letter by "*beseeking*" the Thessalonian saints, and "*exhorting*" them, as a representative of the Lord Jesus, to recall how he had taught them how to "walk and to please God," and to "abound" in these things "more and more" (Ver. 1).

As we have seen, this epistle does not contain one word of reproof or condemnation of the Thessalonian believers, but much *commendation* and praise. Yet, he knew that it was but recently that they had "turned to God from idols," and prior to that time they had taken part in the vile sins associated with pagan idolatry. Thus, in this chapter he exhorts them to take heed to their walk as believers in Christ, especially where moral purity is concerned.

First, in Verses 3-8 he deals with the purity of life that should characterize all believers. They had been called into the wholesomeness of Christian life and were much happier as a result, but he knew what temptations still surrounded them, to say nothing of temptations from within. Thus he begins:

"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication" (Ver. 3).

BIBLICAL SANCTIFICATION

Most Bible students know that in our *King James Version* of the Bible, in both Old and New Testaments, the words "holiness" and "sanctification," with only the rarest exceptions, have the same meaning. In the Old Testament⁹ both words come from the single Hebrew root, *qodesh*, while in the New both come from the single Greek root, *hagiazo*.

⁹ We use the terms Old and New Testament in their generally accepted sense, although strictly speaking the Old Testament, or Covenant, was instituted at Sinai and the New was made at Calvary.

According to most "authorities" *qodesh* and its Greek equivalent, *hagiazō*, simply mean "to set apart" or "to separate." Now it is true that this is the organic meaning of the word, but in actual *usage* its meaning is significantly expanded. In Gen. 2:3; Ex. 3:5; Matt. 6:9 and II Cor. 11:2 - plus many other passages, this word is variously rendered, "sanctified," "holy," "hallowed," and "espoused," but in each case the meaning is, "set apart as *sacred*," "*consecrated*," "*dedicated*." Thus Jerusalem is called "the *holy city*" (Matt. 4:5), the "sanctuary" of the tabernacle, "the *holiest of all*" (Heb. 9:3,8); the Bible is called "the *holy Scriptures*" (Rom. 1:2), and the Spirit of God, "the *holy Spirit*" (Eph. 4:30).

How it would touch the hearts of many believers if they realized that both in our salvation and in our walk it has been God's purpose, not merely to set us apart *from* the world, but to set us apart *as sacred to Himself*? It is by no means a negative imposition of "dos" and "don'ts," but a positive one speaking of God's love to us more than of ours to Him. This truth, to many, would cast an entirely new light on the Bible doctrine of sanctification.

It is with this in mind that the Apostle exhorts the believers at Thessalonica to keep morally pure. He does not say, "This is the will of God, that ye should abstain from fornication," but "This is the will of God, even *your sanctification*, that ye should [for this reason] abstain from fornication." The thought should be, "How can I so grieve the One who loved me enough to die for me, and desires me for His very own?" With moral standards falling all about us, even among the "religious," the believer should take this sincerely to heart. Here we do not merely have "self-control vs. birth-control," but the exercise of self-control *because we are His sacred possession*.

"That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor" (Ver. 4).

It appears that the word "vessel" here may refer either to the believer himself or to his wife. The Greek, *skuos*, is sometimes even used of the "goods" contained in the vessel. This word is used in Scripture of "a chosen vessel," "one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor," "vessels of wrath," "vessels of mercy," "vessels of gold and silver," and "vessels of ivory, and all manner of vessels of most precious wood." Thus our bodies are *containers*, as it were, either of what is good or of what is bad, and each believer should learn to possess his vessel as one who is precious to God, one who will bring Him due honor. In II Tim. 2:21 the Apostle states:

"If a man therefore purge himself from these,¹⁰ he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

¹⁰ In this case he refers to separation from those who "overthrew the faith of some" by false teaching, but surely it would apply equally to anything that dishonors God.

If, however, "his vessel," in Ver. 4, refers to the wife, the exhortation is of equal force, for believers should treat their wives *"in sanctification and honor, not in the lust of concupiscence [i.e., in lustful passion], even as the Gentiles which know not God."*

Believing, as we do, however, that the words, "his vessel," here, probably refer to one's own body, it becomes important to bear in mind that we merely *inhabit* these bodies. We are merely *tenants* who should possess these vessels in sanctification and honor, for a bad tenant can soon ruin a man's house. A good tenant, however, will care for it so that, while it naturally grows older, it will still be in good condition. How many have dissipated their energies and ruined their bodies by sin, rendering them practically useless for God's service! To such the Apostle says:

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"

"For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Cor. 6:19,20).

As to 4:6, KJV supplies the word "*any*," which would make it refer to "any matter." But *Textus Receptus* (which KJV generally follows with considerable care), contains the definite article, and indeed, it does seem from Ver. 7 that the Apostle continues here with the same general subject, i.e., that no believer should "defraud his brother in the matter [i.e., the matter being discussed]; because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified."¹¹ Does not this recall to our minds the words of the Law: "*Thou shalt not commit adultery Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's . . . wife...*" (Ex. 20:14,17).

Finally, the Apostle concludes with words which speak for themselves:

"For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness."¹²

"He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us His holy Spirit" (Vers. 7,8).

Rather than despising, not merely man, but God, let us "walk worthy of our calling" and indeed "possess our vessels in sanctification and honor" to Him.

¹¹ Fraudulence almost always enters into illicit love affairs. Some time ago the writer and his wife sat in a restaurant, where they noticed a couple holding hands across the table and acting too affectionately. Presently the man said to the woman, "What would your husband say if he knew you were here with me?" Evidently the husband did not know, but God knew, and He is "the avenger of all such" (Ver. 6).

¹² The same word *hagiozo* again. He would have us to be wholly *His* in our conduct.

LOVE, QUIETNESS AND HONESTY

"But as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you; for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

"And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more.

"And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;

"That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing."

-- I Thes. 4:9-12

The Apostle's words in Ver. 9 are confirmed by the epistle as a whole. They had indeed been "taught of God to love one another," thus Paul did not need to write them about this. They had even shown their Christian love toward the brethren all through Macedonia. Divisions readily arise, however, between the most sincere believers, thus the Apostle commends them for their attitude and urges them to "increase [in this] more and more" (Ver. 10).

While, as we say, this epistle contains not a word of reproof or condemnation, yet the Apostle exhorts them:

"... study to be quiet and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you" (Ver. 11).

Perhaps Timothy had reported to him an incipient tendency on the part of some to forbear working and to become busybodies (See [II Thes. 3:11,12](#)). It may be that they felt they were justified in just waiting for the Lord to come. In any case, the Apostle urges them to study to be quiet, to mind their own business, as we say, and to "eat *their own* bread" (Ver. 12). And all this, that they might "walk honestly toward them that are without," *and* "have lack of nothing." If they should not heed his exhortation they might well soon find themselves lacking the necessities of life and owing bills to "them that are without." Such lack of integrity and self-reliance can only dishonor God and the message He has committed to our trust.

How wholesome and down-to-earth are the Apostle's exhortations here as to integrity, industry and self-reliance, and what *respect* such conduct is bound to earn for one who would be used of God.

Chapter V - I Thessalonians 4:13-18

"THAT BLESSED HOPE"

THE RAPTURE OF THE BODY TO BE WITH CHRIST

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

"For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

"Then we 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."

-- I Thes. 4:13-18

I WOULD NOT HAVE YOU TO BE IGNORANT

Is it not strange that those very truths concerning which the Apostle says, "*I would not have you to be ignorant,*"--that these are the very truths concerning which believers are apt to be most ignorant. The passage we are now to consider is a prime example of this fact. Nor are we as excusable in this matter as were the babes in Christ at Thessalonica.

We have seen from I Thes. 3:10 that the Apostle at this time was praying "night and day... exceedingly" that he might see these brethren again and "perfect that which [was] lacking in [their] faith." One of these subjects was the future outlook of those of their loved ones who had fallen asleep in Christ. Would they now miss the glory and joy of the Rapture? By no means, says the Apostle, for when our Lord comes for us He will come for the sleeping members of the Body as well as for those who "are alive and remain."

"For . . . we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent¹³ them which are asleep For . . . *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.. . (Vers. 15-17).

THOSE WHO "SLEEP IN JESUS"

A misinterpretation of this passage has led to the erroneous doctrine of "soul sleep." But *never* in Scripture do we read of *soul* sleep: it is rather the *body* which is said to sleep (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 27:52; Acts 13:36).

Death is not the extinction or suspension of persons existence, nor even of *conscious* existence, for the possession of a physical body is not essential to consciousness.¹⁴ For example, our physical eyes do not actually see. The moment after death, though still in perfect physical condition, they obviously see nothing. Our eyes are but the *lenses* through which the inner man now sees the things of this life. But with eyes closed we can see people, houses, mountain rivers, in our dreams and also in our imaginations. Thus in the intermediate state men can see, entirely without physical eyes. To the unbelieving Jews, who insisted that "Abraham is *dead*," our Lord responded, "Abraham . . . saw My day [i.e., My appearance on earth], and was glad" (John 8:56), and in *hades* the Rich Man "lifted up his 'eye and saw Abraham and Lazarus.. ." (Luke 16:23). This, of course, is all apart from intellectual or spiritual insight.

In II Cor. 5:6,8 the Apostle states that "*while* we are, *home in the body*, we are *absent from the Lord*," but add "We are . . . willing rather to be *absent from the body and to be present with the Lord*." Note, he states it both ways for clarity and emphasis. There is nothing about an unconscious state between death and resurrection, indeed this passage makes it clear that *while* the believer is absent from the body he *is* with the Lord, and both II Cor. 5:8 and Phil. 1:21-23 indicate that this latter condition is, for us, one to be *desired*.

When recalling his stoning at Lystra in II Cor. 12:1-3, the Apostle declares that he *does not know* whether he was "*in the body.. . or.. . out of the body*," but he *does* know that at that time he was "*caught up to the third heaven*" and was given a revelation, the glory of which threatened to "exalt" him "above measure" (Vers. 2-7). If the soul "sleeps," or becomes unconscious at death, obviously the apostle would have known that at that time he was *not* "out of the body," but "*in the body*."

Thus in I Thes. 4:13,14 Paul does not speak of Christ bringing souls with Him from heaven, but rather of God bringing the *bodies* of the "sleeping" saints *back from the dead* (See Heb. 13:20, "*brought again from the dead*"). Read carefully the language of Ver. 14:

¹³ Or, have an advantage over (Gr. *phthano*).

¹⁴ The author's book, *Man, His Nature and Destiny*, goes into this subject in depth, especially in its chapters on *Death*, and *The Intermediate State*, Pp. 26-58.

"For IF WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS DIED AND ROSE AGAIN,¹⁵ EVEN SO, them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."¹⁶

The phrase "*if we believe*" is also used with reference to the resurrection of Christ in Rom. 4:23,24, but there it is associated with the righteousness imputed to Abraham by faith; this righteousness to be imputed to us also "*if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.*" Here in I Thes. 4:14 however, it is used as a basis for our comfort when bereaved of loved ones in Christ. "*If we believe that Jesus died and rose again*" it will not be hard to believe that "them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him [i.e., from the dead]."

A SPECIAL REVELATION TO PAUL

"For this we say unto you *by the word of the Lord...*" (Ver. 15).

It is most important to understand that the truth of the Rapture *was a special revelation committed to Paul.* Here he proclaims it "*by the word of the Lord,*" i.e., *to him,* while in I Cor. 15:51, writing on the same subject, he says, "*Behold I show you a mystery,*" (Lit., "*I reveal to you a secret.*").

During the first 40 years or so of the present century there was a genuine, heaven-sent revival in the Church as the great truth of the Lord's coming *for His own* was recovered by men of God like Darby, Scofield, Gaebelien, Ironside, Gray, Gregg, Haldeman, Ottman, Newell and others. In those days great Bible conferences drew capacity crowds and "that blessed hope" burned brightly in the hearts of multitudes of Bible-believing Christians.

Greatly as these men of God were used to call attention to the truth of the Rapture, however, there was one flaw in their basic argument. They did not yet see clearly that the coming of Christ for His own at the close of the present dispensation, was part of the great "mystery" revealed to and through Paul, and as such exclusively the hope of the members of the Body of Christ, the Church of this dispensation. We have seen, in our discussion of I Thes. 1:10 that some used such passages as [Matt. 24:40-42](#); [25:1-13](#); [John 14:3](#) and [Acts 1:11](#) in preaching on the Rapture, and thus unwittingly helped to bring about the "post-tribulation" theory, the teaching that Christ will not come for His own until *after* the Great Tribulation, and that the members of Christ's Body, therefore, will have to endure horrors such as the worm has never known nor ever will know again ([Dan. 12:1](#); [Matt. 24:21](#)). The frightful weapons of destruction with which the nations have been threatening each other have played no small part in convincing fearful believers that the Great Tribulation is at hand, but the Scriptures as to the Rapture teach us that we shall be caught up to be with Christ *before* the dispensation of God's grace gives way to the day of His wrath.

¹⁵ Was it not His *body* that "died and rose again"?

¹⁶ Even as He "*brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus*" (Heb. 13:20).

The above error would have been averted had strict enough attention been paid to Paul's claims as to this revelation. This "mystery" was doubtless one of those "mysteries of God" of which he had been made a steward (I Cor. 4:1), and an integral part of that great body of truth which he calls "*the mystery*," i.e., God's message and program for the Church of this present dispensation, the Body of Christ (Rom. 16:25; I Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:3,9; Col. 1:25,26; 2:2; I Tim. 3:9).

THE SUDDENNESS OF THE RAPTURE

"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye..." (I Cor. 15:52).

Many unbelievers have scoffed at the very idea that suddenly, one day, all true believers in Christ will be caught away from this world to be with Him. But then, they have also ridiculed the idea that He will return to this earth to judge and reign.

But we can brook their sneers. First, because *we believe God*. "*Hath not God [already] made foolish the wisdom of this world?*" (I Cor. 1:20). Second, because the event fits so perfectly with the rest of God's revealed plan.

We would ask the unbeliever: Do *you* think that God will allow men to go on forever rejecting His beloved Son - who came into this world to pay the penalty for man's sins? Do *you* think that the God who created and controls this vast universe, and has shown such a special interest in Planet Earth and those who dwell upon it, has no better plan for them than to allow this world to continue on endlessly as a scene of hospitals and prisons, of marching armies and war and bloodshed and greed and intrigue and suspicion and hate and suffering and sickness and death? Is all this to continue on endlessly? *Preposterous!* God's revealed plan for mankind has already been largely carried out and there is no valid reason to question its further development as He removes His own from the scene and brings the dispensation of grace to a close.

The effects of the sudden removal of the Church of true believers from the world will, of course, be widespread. Among those suddenly caught away there will be drivers of automobiles and trucks, railway engineers, airplane pilots, men in key positions in government, industry, medicine, education and society in general, not to mention millions of humble believers at their daily work or at home with their families. Who can calculate the chaos that will result? Unquestionably this event will have a powerful impact upon every facet of life on earth.

Yet God's Word says almost nothing about all this. The great lesson we learn as we study the Scriptures on the subject is that "the dispensation of the grace of God" will have been brought to an abrupt close as God recalls His ambassadors of peace and prepares to declare war on a Christ-rejecting world (Psa. 2:1-9; 110:1).

The Bible, obviously, will still remain on earth in millions of copies, and ere long there will again be a remnant of believers, suffering believers, but evidently these

will not spring from among those who have heard the message of "grace and peace" and have rejected it, for now the longsuffering of God will have given way to His wrath against unbelief and sin. The Scriptures are clear on this point:

"And then shall that Wicked {one} he revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming;

"Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders,

"And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; BECAUSE THEY RECEIVED NOT THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH, THAT THEY MIGHT BE SAVED.

"And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion,¹⁶ that they should believe a lie:

"That they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thes. 2:9-12).

And this is only the beginning of the manifestation of His wrath upon those who would not accept His grace, for a few years later, when He actually comes to "judge and make war," His eyes are as "a flame of fire," as He returns from Calvary, clothed in "a vesture dipped [Lit., dyed] in blood," to "tread the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of almighty God" ([Rev. 19:11-15](#)).

How urgent, then, for the unsaved to heed the words of the Apostle Paul in II Cor. 6:1,2:

"We, then, as workers together with Him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

"... Behold, NOW is the accepted time; behold, NOW is the day of salvation."

THE DETAILS

The details of the Rapture are delightful indeed to study. Most of them appear here in I Thes. 4:16-18, but others are to be found in I Cor. 15:51-57 and other passages from the epistles of Paul. Let us carefully consider each one.

THE LORD HIMSELF

"For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven.. ." (I Thes. 4:16).

¹⁶ Not directly, but by giving them up to that which their evil hearts desire.

This is the first and most significant reason why the Apostle designates the Rapture as "that blessed hope" (Tit. 2:13). The terminology suggests His greatness and His gracious condescension.

The story is told of a humble Northern private in the Civil War, who lay in a hospital tent slowly recovering from a serious wound. One day he fell off to sleep, to be awakened again by a gentle stroke on his forehead. As he looked up, there stood *President Lincoln himself*, offering words of comfort and encouragement. No more had Lincoln left his bedside than the lad sat up and wrote a letter to his mother. "To think," he wrote, "that *the President of the United States* would stop and talk to *me!*"

This illustration is, of course, a feeble one, for what human anecdote could adequately describe the condescension of our Lord, exalted "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named," in coming *personally* to receive us to Himself forever! True, we will be ushered into His presence by His angelic hosts, but *He* will "descend from heaven" to meet us.

CAUGHT UP

It is not our interpretation of the Scriptures, but a simple *fact* that *only* in Paul's epistles do we read about the Lord's coming into the air to *catch away* the members of His Body to be with Him.

Many feel that John 14:3 refers to the Rapture, since John was apparently written after Paul's epistles and he might have learned about this from Paul. But John, in John 14, merely *records* what our Lord said to His disciples *while still on earth* and this agrees, and must agree, with what He had been tolling these same apostles all along about His return *to judge* the world and *reign as King*.

John 14:2,3 is still interpreted by many to mean that in some way the ascended Lord is now preparing mansions in heaven for His people to dwell in¹⁷ and that when these mansions are ready He will return to catch away His own and bring them to heaven to the mansions prepared for them. This is believed by thousands of Premillenarian Fundamentalists.

But our Lord told His disciples nothing about the present dispensation of grace, or of the catching away of the Church of this age. He rather prepared them for the Tribulation and His return to earth to reign with them.

True, He urged them to lay up treasures in heaven, He exhorted them to trust their Father in heaven, He promised to send the Spirit from heaven, He went to heaven to "receive a kingdom" for Himself and for them, but He made no promise whatever of *taking them there*.

¹⁷ See the Author's book, *The Twofold Purpose of God*, Pp. 54-59 as to these "mansions."

John 14:3 says nothing about "catching up" His disciples and taking them to heaven. He simply says, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."

Thus *when our Lord returns to earth* in glory He will not forget His promise to the twelve. Having returned as He said, He will receive them to Himself in resurrection so that they may reign with Him *on earth* ([Matt. 19:28](#); [Luke 22:28-30](#)). Then will be fulfilled the angelic declaration of Acts 1:11:

"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."

Nothing is said here either, about the disciples being "caught up" to meet the Lord in the air. Rather, having been taken up from them into heaven, our Lord would "come [back] in like manner," i.e., to the place *from whence* He had left them. Thus we read in Zechariah that He will return to the very spot from whence He had departed.

"And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives" ([Zech. 14:4](#); cf. [Acts 1:12](#)).

The "blessed hope" of the Rapture, then, is the peculiar hope of the Body of Christ, the Church of the present dispensation.

TOGETHER!

"... *caught up together*... ." (Ver. 17).

Many sincere believers, who eagerly wait for the fulfillment of "that blessed hope," have never realized that this is *the very first time* when *all* the members of the Body of Christ will be *together*.

Now separated by geographical distance and by death, and fragmented by theological and other divisions, it is difficult to imagine that some glad day we shall be gloriously and eternally *united*, as we are "caught up *together*... to meet the Lord" (Ver. 17).

No more separation then, not even by physical distance! We have heard Christian people express their desire to be "right near to the Lord Himself," or to "sit next to Paul," or some other worthy, in that day, but if this were necessary for fellowship there, being "with Christ" would be no improvement over earth where *togetherness* is concerned.

Now we are limited in many ways. In our present finite condition our senses soon become clogged and confused. We stand on a hillside and our eyes can take in but a limited view, our ears can hear but a few sounds, our nostrils can smell the

fragrance of but a few flowers and our minds can think but a few thoughts. But then these limitations of our faculties will disappear and, partaking of omniscience, we shall enjoy full and intimate communion with all, just as our Lord can now have intimate *personal* communion with multitudes of people, *individually, at the same time.*

THE CLOUDS

"Caught up together . . . in the clouds" (Ver. 17).

Well does the author recall his childhood thoughts at the appearance of any dismal, cloudy day. "This might be the day," he thought, "for does not Rev. 1:7 say: '*Behold, He cometh with clouds*'?"

Ah, but the clouds in which our Lord will return to earth and into which we will be caught up when He comes for us, are not *rain* clouds! Any multitude or host is spoken of in the Bible as a "cloud." In Heb. 12:1, the heroes of the faith listed in Chapter 11 are called "*so great a cloud of witnesses.*" When the Lord led Israel through the wilderness, His guiding presence was veiled in what appeared as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. This was the Shekinah Cloud, the host of His attending angels.

At His incarnation "*the glory of the Lord*" shone about the shepherds, and there was with the announcing angel "*a multitude of the heavenly host*" (Luke 2:9,13). At His transfiguration "*a bright cloud overshadowed them*" (Matt. 17:5). At His ascension "*a cloud received Him out of their sight*" (Acts 1:9). At His coming for us we will be "*caught up... in the clouds*" to meet Him (I Thes. 4:17). And finally, at His return to earth He will come "*in the clouds of heaven*" (Matt. 26:64). Surely the "clouds" here are not *rain* clouds; they are "*a multitude of the heavenly host*" (Luke 2:13), the attendants of "*the Lord of hosts*" (Psa. 103:21, et al).

Thus, angels will be our escorts as we are "caught up" to be "forever with the Lord."

THE SHOUT, THE ARCHANGEL AND THE TRUMP

"... with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." (Ver. 16).

In connection with our Lord's coming for us one angel is particularly mentioned: *Michael*, the "archangel"; (I Thes. 4:16).

There are some who hold that while Israel, God's earthly people, experienced angelic ministry, this is not true of the members of the Body of Christ. And *Michael*, in particular, they say, is designated as Israel's angel in Dan. 12:1, where *Gabriel* calls him "*the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people.*"

But there is a flaw in this argument. It is true that Michael was Israel's angel for a time, but surely he was not Israel's angel during the more than two thousand years before there was an Israel. Nor is he Israel's angel today, while Israel is Lomami: *not God's people*.

It would be more correct to call Michael the Commander in Chief of the Lord's armies. He is God's soldier, just as Gabriel is His ambassador. He is seen in a fighting role, as Gabriel is seen in that of a messenger (See [Dan. 10:12,13, 20,21](#); [Rev. 12:7-9](#)). It is significant that along with the mention of the archangel in I Thes. 4, we also have the "shout" and the "trump,"¹⁷ both associated with the "call to arms" in the Scriptures. Indeed, the term "the voice of the archangel," doubtless refers to Michael's call to readiness.

But why military preparedness, as it were, in connection with such a blessed event as our going to be with Christ?

This question is not difficult to answer when we realize that at our Lord's coming for us we are to be ushered into the sphere in which Satan and his hosts have intruded to do us harm, for Satan is referred to as "*the prince of the power of the air*" ([Eph. 2:2](#)), from whence, between his own domain ([Eph. 6:12](#)) and ours, he engages us in conflict.

Hence the "shout," the "voice of the archangel" and the "trump of God," are all appropriate as our Lord comes with the multitude of His holy angels to receive us to Himself.

THE DEAD RAISED THE LIVING TRANSFORMED

".. . the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them . . . to meet the Lord in the air.. ."
(Vers. 16, 17).

Concerning those members of the Body of Christ who will have died before His coming, the Apostle says that they shall be raised in "*incorruptibility.. . in glory.. . in power . . . [in] spiritual bodies,*" bearing "*the image of the heavenly*" ([I Cor. 15:42-44,49](#)), and those who protest that the resurrection of the dead is itself an impossibility, he silences with the devastating reply:

¹⁷ Since this trumpet is called "the last trump" in I Cor. 15:52, it is supposed by some that both passages refer to the seventh trumpet of the Great Tribulation (Rev. 11:15). But this would be anticipating revelation, for how could the Apostle refer to the last of seven future trumpets when it was not yet revealed that there would be seven, or even two or three? Moreover, the seven trumpets of the Tribulation are referred to with *equal* significance while that referred to here in I Thes. 4 is called "*the trump of God.*" Thus it refers to the trumpet which will sound "at the last"; i.e., for us.

"Thou fool! That which thou sowest is not quickened *except it die*" (I Cor. 15:36).

In other words: Look about you and see how your objections are answered by the *fact* of the resurrection of the dead, taking place all about you. This was confirmed by our Lord, when He said:

"Verily, verily I say unto you, *Except a [grain] of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit*" (John 12:24).

Then, when the believing dead have been raised in glorified bodies, "we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them" (1 Thes. 4:17). But here other passages provide glorious information that 1 Thes. 4 does not contain.

In I Cor. 15:51 the Apostle declares:

"Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we *shall* all be changed."

And the glory of this "change" is indicated in the following verses, where we are told that

"... this corruptible must put on incorruptibility, and *this mortal must put on immortality*" (1 Cor. 15:53).

"For our conversation¹⁸ is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ:

"Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned *like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself*" (Phil. 3:20,21).

The fact that we shall be "caught up" bodily from this earth in itself implies that some great physical change will take place when our Lord comes for us. Will the law of gravity be suspended? No, it is we who will be changed--gloriously changed to be "like unto" our risen, glorified Lord.

But this change will involve more than our bodies. Indeed, a change will be effected which sincere believers have sought all their lives with only a small degree of success. We refer to the moral and spiritual change of which Paul has so much to say in his epistles.

¹⁸ Or "citizenship" (Gr., *polituma*).

James and Paul both liken the Word of God to a mirror, but James speaks of the Law, while Paul proclaims grace, and the Law and grace fulfill opposite functions in the believer's life. James says:

"For if any be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in¹⁹ a glass:

"For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was" (James 1:23,24).

How typical! When one looks into the divine Mirror to behold *himself* he generally does not like what he sees, for this Mirror "tells it like it is." But what does he generally do about it? Little or nothing. Rather, he goes his way "straightway forgetting what manner of man he was." This is because the Law gives little motivation and no power to the natural man to set things right in his life.

Paul also encourages us to look into the Word, the divine Mirror, but urges us to "tilt" the Mirror, as it were, to observe, not ourselves but Christ -- and see the result:

"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass *the glory of the Lord*, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (II Cor. 3:18).

Ah, as we behold, in the divine Mirror, "the glory of the Lord," it produces a change *in us*. Suppose you look at yourself in a mirror. It will show you just as you are, with all the wrinkles and physical defects. But the mirror will effect no change *in you*. But now suppose you tilt the mirror so as to see some bright light. Ah, now the light is reflected upon your face and effects a change in you, brightening your countenance. Thus, says Paul, as we "behold the glory of the Lord" in the Word, we are gradually "*changed into the same image, from glory to glory.*"

Gradually changed, we say, for while this change into Christ's likeness is - or should be - the deep desire of every believing heart, how slowly the transformation takes place! Indeed, the word rendered "changed" here is the Greek *metamorphoomai*, from which our English *metamorphosis*, or gradual change, is directly derived.

But one day, we are assured, God will step in and do something about this. For here in I Cor. 15:51,52 He uses *a different* word (Gr., *allasso*) and different phraseology, emphasizing not so much the transformation as the fact that *He* will bring it about, and in this case the change will be *instantaneous and complete*.

"... We shall not all sleep, but we *shall* all be changed,

"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye..."

¹⁹ Note, "in," not through. He refers to a *mirror*.

Mark well, this passage refers to *all* the members of the Body of Christ, whether living or dead, for even those who are "*absent from the body* [i.e., their physical bodies] and present with the Lord," still await "the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23), the body which was for so long the vehicle of sin. But when our Lord comes for us, *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*, we shall all be changed, transformed into the likeness of the Lord of glory!

What a word of encouragement this is! After all our prayers and struggles and tears; after all our recriminating ourselves for our failure to grow faster; after all this – and years of it -- will come one *blessed moment* when God will take over suddenly and completely, when by His wonderful grace the desired change will blessedly take place.

THE MEETING IN THE AIR THE NATURE OF THIS MEETING

First, it should be observed that this will be a *called* meeting, not a casual meeting. We shall be "*caught up... to meet the Lord in the air.*" This meeting, of course, will be what is elsewhere called "*the judgment seat of Christ*" (Rom. 14:10; II Cor. 5:10).

The author has long felt that this meeting with the Lord will be the most *appropriate* occasion of our whole Christian experience. Of all we have ever done, or ever will do; of all we have experienced or ever will experience, nothing ever was or will be so *appropriate*, so *fitting*, as this meeting with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The phrase, "the judgment seat of Christ," is found twice in Paul's epistles:

".. . **we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ**" (Rom. 14:10).

".. . **we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ**" (II Cor. 5:10).

This has troubled many a student of the Word, since we know that (1.) Christ died to deliver us from the penalty of sin, and (2.) John 5:24; Rom. 8:1 and other passages, especially in Paul's epistles, clearly state that believers in Christ have been justified and will *not* come into judgment.

However, the word *bema*, the Greek word here rendered "judgment seat," is not the same as that generally used to refer to *penal* justice, Gr., *krino*. *True*, *bema* is *sometimes* used in connection with judgments at which men are either condemned for crimes, or acquitted, but it is *also* used in connection with athletic contests, at which the winners receive, or fail to receive, awards for superior performance. And the Greek word *krino* is *not* so used.

It is clear, then, that "the judgment seat of Christ" is not a judgment for sin (this is already past for the believer), but a judgment of the believer's "performance" as *a Christian*.

When the Apostle declares in Rom. 14:10 that "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ," he writes to believers, who have already been justified at the bar of God's justice ([Rom. 4:25--5:1](#)), therefore he *cannot* be referring to *penal* judgment.

This is further confirmed by those passages which deal with "the judgment seat of Christ." Let us examine some of them.

THE QUESTION OF SERVICE

We do not find the *phrase*, "judgment seat of Christ" in I Cor. 3:10-17, but as we shall see, this is what the Apostle is discussing. He opens this passage by saying:

"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I HAVE LAID THE FOUNDATION, AND ANOTHER BUILDETH THEREON. BUT LET EVERY MAN TAKE HEED HOW HE BUILDETH THEREUPON" (Ver. 10).

Mark well, Paul does not say that he has been *building* on a foundation already laid (Cf., [Matt. 16:16-18](#)). He says distinctly, "I have *laid the foundation*, and another buildeth thereon." A new dispensation was ushered in with the raising up of Paul: "*the dispensation of the grace of God*," with its "*gospel of the grace of God*," and its glorious truths about the Church, the Body of Christ, and its heavenly position and blessings ([Eph. 3:1-3](#); [Acts 20:24](#); [Eph. 1:3,22,23](#)), truths upon which the Church of this dispensation was to be built. Thus he warns: "I *have laid the foundation... Let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon*" (Ver. 10).

Who knows how suddenly the great Building Inspector may appear to examine "every man's *work*, of what *sort* it is" ([I Cor. 3:13](#))? For the passage goes on to explain that those who have built upon the Pauline foundation according to the plans and specifications given to him for the building of the Church today, will "*receive a reward*" (Ver. 14). They built with the "*gold, silver and precious stones*" of Verse 12. But those who have built Mosaic, or Messianic, or Petrine material upon the Pauline foundation will "suffer loss" (Ver. 15). Their "*work*" or efforts (not they themselves, nor those whom they may have led to Christ) will be burned as so much "*wood, hay and stubble*" (Vers. 12,15), for they have confused Law with grace and the program for the kingdom of Christ with the program for the Body of Christ.

It is not enough to "win souls to Christ" and to teach them to live "good lives." Popular evangelism and Bible teaching have produced increased confusion and division rather than a Church whose teachings are consistent and harmonious. But this does not even seem to have occurred to those Christian leaders who have

ignored, and sometimes even opposed, the mighty message committed to Paul for us today.

But some day the Building Inspector will summon us all, and then it will be seen whether or not we were workmen whom God can approve, "*rightly dividing the Word of truth*" (II Tim. 2:15).

THE QUESTION OF CONDUCT

II Cor. 5:10,11 also deals with "the judgment seat of Christ," but here the believer's *conduct* rather than his service, is in view.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad".²⁰

In this connection the Apostle goes on to say:

"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.. ." (Ver. 11).

Does the reader ask, "Will there be terror at our meeting with Christ, a meeting to which every believer should be looking forward with keen anticipation? Can the call to such a meeting be a 'blessed hope'?"

First, let us state that there will indeed be terror there -- and this is most appropriate. If one of us were summoned to appear before the President of the United States a few days hence, this would be a great honor, but would not: of us be frightened too? Not necessarily that we had anything wrong, but simply because of the dignity of his position. This is wholesome fear, the kind we ought to experience when contemplating that solemn meeting the Son of God, the Creator of all -- and the One who loved us and shed His life's blood to save us from sin. Some believers cannot yet see this. They think only of the joy of seeing the One who loved and died for them, not giving consideration to His infinite greatness, or to the fact it was *our sins* for which He suffered and died.

But "the terror of the Lord," in connection with our meeting with Him "at that day," is the more appropriate when we consider that He knows *everything* about us, our deeds, our thoughts, our motives, and it is just because He, the knowing One, will one day deal with our conduct as believers that the Apostle says,

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ... Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (II Cor. 5:10,11).

²⁰ Thayer: "evil, corrupt, etc., in the sense that it is not what it ought to be." The phrase might be rendered, "*good or no good*" as of good or bad fruit.

This "terror," or fear, we say, is appropriate in redeemed sinners. Indeed, Paul exhorts us in varied phraseology, "*Be not highminded, but fear*" (e.g., [Rom. 11:20](#)), while declaring it an offense to God among the unregenerate that "*there is no fear of God before their eyes*" ([Rom. 3:18](#)).

It is appropriate, then, that the 'blessed hope' carry with it some element of fear. Not fear that we will be punished for our sins, but that the divine Judge, as He views our service and conduct, will, *with* lavish rewards²¹; for what is truly "good," have to pronounce much in all our records "*no good*," worthless.

Does some reader object, "But you have said that Christ died for all my sins and put them away." True, but *as a believer*, what good were you to Him while committing sins for which He died? What kind of a testimony were you? What a way was this to say "thanks"? Some day we are all going to have to meet our blessed Lord about this. And would you not, dear reader, want to get all this straightened out and cleared away? Would you not want to have it uncovered and acknowledged before entering fully into the glories of heaven? Would you not want all the dross to be burned away? Thus those passages which deal with the judgment seat of Christ say nothing about any *penalties*; only about rewards and the loss of rewards ([I Cor. 3:14,15](#)).

It is often asked, "*Will there be tears in heaven*"? In heaven? We doubt it. But we do believe that at the judgment seat of Christ there will be something tantamount to tears. It certainly will be no joyous experience---especially for *His* sake---to "suffer loss" for the many times we failed Him.²²

It seems to this writer, therefore, that every true believer, who has any conception of the love of Christ and of the infinite price He paid to relieve us of the burden of our sins, would want to have these hidden things brought to light and disposed of by the Lord Himself. This is why we say that, even though, in a way, a terrifying experience to contemplate, the judgment seat of Christ will doubtless be the most *appropriate--and blessed--occasion* of our entire Christian experience, and one reason why our Lord's coming for us *is* truly a "*blessed hope*."

In closing this section, let us remember that "*if we would judge ourselves we would not be judged*," ([I Cor. 11:31](#)), either by God's discipline now, or by loss of rewards at the judgment seat of Christ. How wise, then, to clear these sins and failures away in confession to God *at the time*, lest we lose our spiritual power and prove "no good" to Him!

How much more could be said about all this, but we must not wander too far from our main subject. We will leave it to our readers to look up and earnestly consider such pas-sages as [I Cor. 9:24-27](#); [II Cor. 4:17](#) and [II Tim. 2:12,13](#).

²¹ The Lord is a most generous Rewarder ([Matt. 10:42](#)).

²² See the author's booklet, *Will There Be Tears in Heaven?*

WHERE THE MEETING WILL BE HELD

There has been a great deal of misunderstanding as to where this meeting, the judgment seat of Christ, will be held. There is a hymn titled, *The Meeting in the Air* which nevertheless states that this meeting will be held "in that home beyond the sky," and indeed, most people seem to have the notion that at the Rapture our Lord will take us to heaven with Him. But not yet.

I Thes. 4:17 clearly states that at our Lord's coming for us we will be caught up "to meet the Lord in *the air*," and lest there be any question as to where this is, it should be observed that our English word "air" is directly derived from the Greek word pronounced exactly the same: *air*. Any Greek dictionary or lexicon will state that it refers to the atmosphere around and above us. We have this word in Acts 22:23, where the people "*threw dust into the air*," and this is the general usage of the word. Thus it is a mistake to suppose that when our Lord comes for us He will take us immediately to "that home beyond the sky," the *epouraneous*, or upper heavens, where He dwells.

Thank God, He has given us a present position "*in heavenly places*"²³ in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6), where we are blessed with "*all spiritual blessings... in Christ*" (Eph. 1:3). This is where we will one day be taken bodily, for we shall be *forever with the Lord* (I Thes. 4:17). But first the "meeting in the air," held there, as the culmination of our long battle with "*the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience*" (Eph. 2:2), who also is active in confusing and dividing the saints and in tempting them to evil.

WHEN THE MEETING WILL BE HELD

From the passage in I Thes. 4 alone it seems clear enough that the judgment seat of Christ will convene immediately upon our having been "caught up" to be with Christ, but there are other clear Scriptures that refer to the same event and also indicate exactly when it will convene. In I Cor. 4:5 the Apostle says:

"Therefore, judge nothing before the time, *until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise*²⁴ of God."

When will the "hidden things" be revealed? *When* will we receive "praise of God"? "*When the Lord comes.*" There will be things we did for Him to which we gave little or no thought, but *He* noticed them and appreciated them, and we will surely be rewarded for them. All this, of course, entirely apart from salvation. Salvation is not a reward for good works, but *faithful believers* will be richly rewarded in addition to having been saved.

²³ The *epouraneous*.

²⁴ Whatever praise is due, of course.

Another passage which tells us *when* the judgment seat of Christ will convene is II Tim. 4:7,8:

"I have fought a good fight, 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*."

When will Paul and other believers receive their crowns? "*At that day*," the day of "*His appearing*."

Thus there is cumulative evidence that the judgment seat of Christ will take place at the rapture of the Church, which is His Body:

Note carefully the words: "*caught up... to meet the Lord in the air*"... "*until the Lord come, who will... bring to light the hidden things of darkness*"... "*a crown of righteousness, which the Lord... shall give me at that day... unto all them also that love His appearing*."

FOREVER WITH THE LORD

"... and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thes. 4:17).

What could indicate more clearly that the reason our Lord will come for us *Himself* is because He loves us and wants us for Himself? Yes, *Christ... loved the Church, and gave Himself for it,* that some day He might *present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing...*" (Eph. 5:25-27). What a prospect!

Lest the very thought of appearing before the judgment seat of Christ should frighten and discourage some sincere believer, we hasten to say that while Paul used "the terror of the Lord" to persuade the carnal Corinthians, he used the lavish grace of God to encourage sincere believers to live for Him, for our Lord will richly reward their humblest service or act of devotion -- and more: He desires us *for eternal and blessed fellowship with Himself*.

"FOR THE GRACE OF GOD THAT BRINGETH SALVATION HATH APPEARED TO ALL MEN,

"TEACHING US THAT, DENYING UNGODLINESS AND WORLDLY LUSTS, WE SHOULD LIVE SOBERLY, RIGHTEOUSLY AND GODLY, IN THIS PRESENT WORLD:

"LOOKING FOR THAT BLESSED HOPE, AND THE GLORIOUS APPEARING OF THE GREAT GOD AND OUR SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST;

"WHO GAVE HIMSELF FOR US, THAT HE MIGHT REDEEM US FROM ALL INIQUITY, AND PURIFY UNTO HIMSELF A PECULIAR PEOPLE, ZEALOUS OF GOOD WORKS" (Tit. 2:11-14).

COMFORT ONE ANOTHER

The above facts give us ample reason to comfort one another with the "blessed hope" of the Rapture, but there is more.

Where the Scriptures speak of our Lord's *return to earth* the context inevitably is one of trouble, sorrow, war, bloodshed -- and *the wrath of God*. But no such thing can be said of those Scriptures which proclaim the rapture of the Church. In these references we find not one word about the Tribulation or the wrath of God, but rather, in I Thes. 4:15-18, the most detailed description of the Rapture, the apostle closes with the exhortation, "*Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*" More than this, in Chapter 5, where he does deal with the Tribulation, he reassures the members of the Body of Christ with the words:

"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

"Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep,²⁵ we should live together with Him.

"WHEREFORE COMFORT YOURSELVES TOGETHER, AND EDIFY ONE ANOTHER, EVEN AS ALSO YE DO" (I Thes. 5:9-11).

IS THE RAPTURE IMMINENT?

The word "imminent" refers simply to that which is *apt to happen without delay*.

Consistently, where the rapture of the members of Christ's body is concerned, the event is presented as being imminent. In I Thes. 1:9,10, the Apostle reminds the Thessalonian believers how they had "turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and *to wait for His Son from heaven...*" Similarly he states that the Corinthian believers were "*waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (I Cor. 1:7). To the Philipplians he wrote:

"For our conversation [Lit., "commonwealth," "citizenship"] is in heaven, from whence *also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*" (Phil. 3:20).

This agrees with I Cor. 15:51, where we have his word to the Corinthians:

"We shall not all sleep, but we *shall* all be changed."

²⁵ Both referred to in I Cor. 15:51,52 and I Thes. 4:15-18.

Indeed, in most of his references to the Rapture the Apostle, clearly shows that he himself, when he wrote of these things, expected to be among those living at the time of Christ's coming for His own. His use of the pronouns "we" and "us" in this connection makes this clear. Evidently he had no idea that God, in mercy, would extend the day of grace for more than 1900 years--making the dispensation of grace to last at least 400 years longer than the dispensation of Law. But such is the mercy and longsuffering of God (See [II Pet. 3:9](#)).

A PROBLEM

Those who teach that the Rapture will not take place after the Tribulation argue, of course, that the coming of Christ for His Church *cannot* be imminent; that we should not be waiting and looking for Him to come for us at any moment. From this it logically follows that Titus and the believers at [Corinth](#), [Thessalonica](#) and [Philippi](#), should not have been waiting and looking for the Lord either, for according to the "post-tribulation" argument the Lord could not -- and cannot -- come for the Church until the Tribulation has run its course.

But the "post-tribulationists" argue further that "time-consuming events" in the life of Paul himself indicate that the believers at that time *could not* legitimately be looking for the Lord to come for them. Perhaps the outstanding passages along this line are those in which the Lord said to Paul:

"Be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou has testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome" (Acts 23:11).

"Fear not, thou must be brought before Caesar. . ." (Acts 27:24).

How, it is asked, could Paul have been looking momentarily for the Rapture, when the Lord had explicitly informed him that he would reach Rome and stand before Caesar?

THE ANSWER

First, it is an axiom of logic that "the whole is greater than any of its parts." This is true also of the Word of God, and the careful student will never allow a local situation to negate the general teaching of Scripture.

In the case before us it is the general teaching of Paul's epistles that the Lord Jesus Christ would -- and will -- come to take His own out of this world, and that they should ever be waiting and looking for this event, since it *could* take place at any moment as far as *they* know.

Shall we now allow a local situation in Acts 23 to militate against all of Paul's teachings on this subject? Shall we say that the Thessalonians, the Corinthians, the Philippians, Titus, and the other believers should *not* have been looking for the

Lord to come because Paul must first get to Rome before this event could take place? No, let us rather look more carefully into the local situation.

When the Lord promised Paul that he would bear witness for Him at Rome, Paul had already written to the Thessalonians and the Corinthians about the rapture of the Church, and had taught them to be waiting and looking for that event. Moreover, Paul had proclaimed this truth "by the Word of the Lord" (i.e., by divine revelation). It was a divine secret first revealed to and through him by the glorified Lord ([I Thes. 4:15](#); [I Cor. 15:51](#)). *At that time* Paul himself was obviously expecting the Lord to come at any time, as we have pointed out.

It was considerably *after* this that the Lord revealed to Paul that he would reach Rome and stand before Caesar. *Thus for the time being*, Paul, and perhaps a few of his associates, knew that he must stand before Caesar before the Lord could come for His Church, but there is no indication that this news reached all or any of the churches he had founded. They still would be looking for the Lord to come at any time.

As to the Philippians and Titus, Paul's letters to them were written, evidently, after he had already stood before Caesar, so that he could quite legitimately tell them to be looking for the Lord from heaven, as indeed he did.

Further, the word "imminent" may be used either in an absolute, or in a relative way. In the absolute, we know that there is a *given time* in our Lord's plan for "the Church which is His Body," when He will come again to receive His own to Himself. *In that sense* His coming for His own will not be "imminent," or impending, until *just before it actually takes place*. But we, *who do not know* how long the Lord will tarry in grace, must use this word in its *relative sense*. As far as the Thessalonians knew, as far as the Corinthians, the Philippians and Titus knew -- and as far as we know, the coming of the Lord for us is imminent. He may, as far as we know, come at *any time*. The dispensation of grace is timeless and signless as far as the revealed Word of God is concerned. There is nothing that need happen, or ever needed to happen in fulfillment of prophecy before the dispensation of grace is brought to a close by the coming of our Lord for His own. Thus the believers of Paul's day were told, as we today are told, to be waiting and looking for our blessed Lord to come for us.

Paul's inspired teachings about the imminent coming of Christ for His own are as valid today as they were when he first wrote about them --- and more so, for every day that our Lord delays His coming to recall His ambassadors is a day of amazing grace ([II Cor. 6:2](#); [Eph. 5:15,16](#)). Yet, while we should thank God for His love and mercy in waiting still for some who will be saved - as He waited for us - our hearts should ever rejoice in "*that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ*" to receive us to Himself before the prophesied Tribulation breaks on this Christ - rejecting world.

Chapter VI - I Thessalonians 5:1-11

THE DAY OF THE LORD

PROPHECY vs. THE MYSTERY

"But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

"For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

"For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape."

-- I Thes. 5:1-3

I Thessalonians 5 is properly introduced with the word "*But*," separating the subject matter of 4:15-18 from that of 5:1-3. Observe:

1. The former has to do with *the Body of Christ*, while the latter is related to *the Kingdom of Christ*.

2. The closing verses of Chapter 4 deal with a "mystery," *a secret*, first revealed through Paul (4:15; cf. [I Cor. 15:51](#)), while the opening verses of Chapter 5 deal with prophetic truths which had been proclaimed for many centuries. In-deed, the first two verses contain *three* familiar prophetic phrases: *'the times and the seasons,' 'the day of the Lord,'* and *"a thief in the night."*

3. The former passage deals with the rapture of the members of the Body to be with Christ, while the latter is related to the subsequent *return of Christ to earth to reign*.

4. The Thessalonian believers needed more light on the truth of the Rapture (3:10; 4:13-18), whereas they understood "perfectly," or accurately, the truth about "the day of the Lord," so that Paul could say to them concerning this subject: "Ye have no need that I write unto you" (5:1, 2).

5. I Thes. 4:13-18 concerns *us* believers, while I Thes. 5:1-3 concerns *them*, the unbelievers whom Christ will judge prior to His reign. In the former passage we find the word "we" four times, and even the "them" who have "fuller asleep," are raised to join those "who are alive and remain," at which *we* are *all* "caught up *together*... to meet the Lord in the air" (Ver. 17). But in the latter passage "*they*" are the subject. "When *they* shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon *them* . . . and *they* shall not escape" (Ver. 3).

6. Finally, while the former passage closes with an exhortation to "*comfort one another with these words*" the latter is clearly one that should strike fear into the hearts of unbelievers.

The contrast between the two passages, then, is marked indeed, and it is a great pity that some well-meaning men of God should confuse the joyous day of the Rapture with the calamitous "day of the Lord," placing the Rapture after the Great Tribulation, thus *frightening* the very ones they should be "comforting."

Before we deal with this unscriptural theory, let us state clearly that the former passage concerns believing saints of God and a sacred secret first revealed through Paul, proclaiming their "prior hope" of glorious deliverance from the time of God's wrath, and affording them the most blessed comfort. But the latter passage deals with a Christ-rejecting world and the "sudden destruction" that will overtake it, inescapable vengeance, coming as "travail upon a woman with child," when at last the scores of prophetic warnings on the subject, so long unheeded, will be fulfilled.

But some have asked why the Apostle wrote these believers with regard to "the day of the Lord," if they understood this truth so perfectly. The answer is found in the first word of Chapter 5: "*But.*" By *contrasting* the Rapture with "the day of the Lord," he emphasizes the *disrelation* of the one from the other.

THE THESSALONIAN PROBLEM

I Thes. 5:1-3, with its "day of the Lord," coming as "a thief in the night," bringing "sudden destruction," is strikingly like our Lord's predictions in Matthew 24 concerning the "great tribulation" and His return to earth to reign.

But *this* was not the problem that troubled the Thessalonian believers. At this point, certainly, they were not concerned with Antichrist and the Great Tribulation. Their concern was over their loved ones who had died in Christ. Would these now miss the Rapture? And Paul's answer is that these shall *rise first* to join them "who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord" for His saints. Hence, concerning this blessed event he says, "*Wherefore comfort one another with these words*" (4:18).

THE DAY OF MAN and THE DAY OF THE LORD

To gain a clear understanding of the Scriptural phrase, "*the day of the Lord,*" we must compare it with the day of man.

In Deuteronomy 28 God promised the people of Israel that if they obeyed His laws He would make them "*the head and not the tail*" among the nations of the earth (Ver. 13), but He also warned them: "But . . . if thou wilt not hearken unto the

voice of the Lord thy God... *he [the Gentile] shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail*" (Vers. 15,44).

As we know, Israel apostatized, departing farther and farther from Jehovah, the true God, and even wallowing in pagan idolatry, until the Assyrian and Babylonian empires carried them away captive into many lands. It was then, some six centuries before Christ, that political domination passed fully from Israel to the Gentiles ([Jer. 15:4](#); [24:9](#) and [29:18](#)), and Israel found herself "the tail and not the head" among the nations.

Thus, when our Lord was on earth Israel was under the domination of the Roman Empire ([Luke 2:1](#)). This period of Gentile domination is called "*the times of the Gentiles*" in [Luke 21:24](#). It should be observed, however, that all this, concerns only political domination. Israel had not yet been cast away spiritually.

When our Lord was on earth, He taught his disciples to pay tribute to Caesar ([Matt. 22:17-21](#)) but to obey the scribes, and Pharisees where their God-given religion was concerned. even though the scribes and Pharisees were hypocritical in their motives ([Matt. 23:2,3](#)). Thus the political government was "of the Romans," but "*salvation [was] of the Jews*" ([John 4:22](#)).

But Scripturally "the times of the Gentiles" may also be called *the day of man*. Whereas Israel, even under her kings, was constituted as a theocracy, with Jehovah as her final authority, we later find the prophet Daniel interpreting for Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian emperor, the meaning of a colossal image of a *man* he had seen in a dream. The head was of gold, the chest and arms of silver, the torso of brass, the legs of iron and the feet of iron mixed with clay. These, as described in order, evidently signified the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian and Roman empires --plus the *revived* Roman Empire ([Dan. 2:37-43](#)). The metals from head to foot, descending from gold to silver to brass to iron to iron mixed with clay, signified the deterioration in Gentile government from Nebuchadnezzar down to "the *beast*," the head of the revived Roman Empire ([Dan. 2:38,39](#); cf. [Rev. 13:1](#)).

Daniel then predicted further that it would be in the days of the last of these empires, with its ten toes, or kings ([2:44](#); [7:24](#); [Rev. 13:1](#)), that the "stone... cut out without hands" would strike the feet and the whole topheavy structure would collapse: the day of man coming to an end with the "stone," the Lord Jesus Christ, smiting "these kingdoms" and setting up His own kingdom on earth:

"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and *it shall stand forever*" ([Dan. 2:44](#)).

Thus will *the day of man* give way to "*the day of the Lord*," the "day of the Lord" proper, of course, being the day when He reigns over the world. Then:

"The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, AND THE LORD ALONE SHALL BE EXALTED IN THAT DAY" (Isa. 2:11).

One important fact about the image of Daniel 2 has, however, been overlooked by most Bible teachers, i.e., *the great gap between the Roman Empire of our Lord's day and its future revival*. Rome did indeed rule as the iron kingdom, with Nero its last Caesar, but the succeeding centuries tell the story of its fall. Nor, after 1500 years, has it as yet been revived.²⁶

Nor again does Daniel's prophecy touch upon the empires that lay *between* the fall of the Roman Empire and its still-future revival, such as the British Empire, whose rule was so far-flung that for a time it could be said: "The sun never sets upon Britain."

Why this gap in prophecy? Why is nothing said of this intervening period? The answer is one which most Bible teachers today fail to see, and in some cases even oppose as false doctrine. It is the fact that the prophetic program has been divinely *interrupted* by the revelation of a "mystery," a sacred secret: the ushering in of "*the dispensation of the grace of God*" through Paul, the chief of sinners, saved by grace (Eph. 3:1-4; Col. 1:24-27). Thus prophecy gave way to "the mystery" and its associated mysteries, first revealed to Paul (I Cor. 4:1,2).

When the last of these "associated mysteries," the coming of Christ to catch away His own (I Thes. 4:14-17; I Cor. 15:51,52), shall have taken place, Rome will be revived, then smitten by the "stone cut out without hands"²⁷ and destroyed. Then will follow the full manifestation of "the day of the Lord."

Those who fail to see this "gap" in prophecy have real problems with what is happening, or not happening, today. One such has said: "We see the ten kingdoms forming before our very eyes!" The author has heard this for some fifty years, and it is becoming a bit tiring. How can these ten kingdoms, referred to above, be forming now when the Roman Empire has not even been revived? How true it is: Understand the "mystery" and you will have less trouble understanding prophecy.

THE DAY OF THE LORD ITS DURATION

The Scriptures have much to say about "the day of the Lord," but exactly what period of time does this "day" cover?

²⁶ Well do we recall Benito Mussolini's boast: "Raise your hears, your flags, your swords, to greet, after 1500 years, the reappearance of an empire on the fateful hills of Rome!" But ere long Mussolini was left hanging by his feet in a Roman square as passers-by spat in his face.

²⁷ I.e., wholly the work of God.

Generally speaking, of course, the term refers to the time when the day of man, or "the times of the Gentiles," will be brought to an end and "the Lord alone shall be exalted" ([Isa. 2:11,17](#)). But will it include more than the actual return and reign of Christ? Will it include the prophesied tribulation period, *during which God will bring Gentile rule to an end*? We believe it will.

One "post-tribulation" writer cautions us not to confuse the day of the devil's wrath ([Rev. 12:12](#)) with the day of God's wrath, and states: "The day of the Lord follows the tribulation and is the day of the Lord's wrath upon those who 'know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ' ([II Thes. 1:8](#))."

But this interpretation does not take into account all that the Scriptures say about the day of the Lord --and contradicts some of it.

When our Lord returns to earth in person, "in flaming fire taking vengeance" and "punishing" with "everlasting destruction," He will evidently dispatch His enemies forth-with. There is no evidence that this will cover a protracted period of time. But Paul, describing the arrival of the day of the Lord in I Thes. 5:1-3 says nothing about the personal return of Christ, and does describe a protracted period of suffering and trouble. Read his statement carefully:

"... the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night, for when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction COMETH UPON THEM, AS TRAVAIL UPON A WOMAN WITH CHILD, AND THEY SHALL NOT ESCAPE" (Ver. 3).

Thus the phrase, "thief in the night," is not used to describe suddenness, but *unexpectedness*. The thief plans his visit for the time when he will be least expected (Matt. 24:43,44). But "*travail upon a woman with child*," illustrates a *protracted* time of suffering *increasing in intensity*.

When Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel "in the midst of the week"²⁸ ([Dan. 9:27](#)), "destruction" will suddenly break out, but this does not mean that it will run its course in a moment. Rather, it will "*come upon them*" suddenly, and run its course "*as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.*"

This, we suggest, illustrates the "great tribulation" far more accurately than does the actual return of Christ, for during the Great Tribulation the world's troubles will indeed increase both in frequency and intensity, "*and they shall not escape.*"

Mark well, this "destruction," to take place during "the day of the Lord," will overtake the world of the ungodly unexpectedly, just when they are congratulating themselves as having attained "peace and safety" ([I Thes. 5:3](#)).

²⁸ I.e., of years. See Gen. 29:27.

Now, think carefully. Will *anyone* be saying, "Peace and safety" at the *close* of the "great tribulation"? Will *anyone* rejoice in "peace and safety" as the battle of Armageddon rages? How then, can this passage about "the day of the Lord" refer only to the return of Christ at the *close* of the Tribulation? But when we see that "the day of the Lord" begins *with*, rather than *after* the Tribulation, all is in order.

As we know, the seven years of the Tribulation will begin with the rider on the white horse (Rev. 6:1,2), evidently Antichrist (Cf. Rev. 19:11), who goes forth "conquering and to conquer." Like Antiochus Epiphanes, he will "come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries" (Dan. 11:21). All will go well for him and he will bring to the world a kind of peace that will win him universal allegiance. "*Peace and safety!*" *the world will exclaim.*²⁹

But of the rider on the *next* horse we read, "*and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth*" (Rev. 6:4). Then follow war, famine and death (Vers. 3-8).

There you have it! Our "post tribulation" brethren say that "the day of the Lord *follows* the tribulation." Paul, in I Thes. 5:1-3, makes it clear that the day of the Lord *includes* the Tribulation. *They* have men in the closing, most terrible hours of the Tribulation, saying, "*Peace and safety!*" They have the Lord's *swift judgment* upon the ungodly described as "*travail upon a woman with child!*" Nothing fits.

But there is more Scriptural evidence against the "post-tribulation" view. Two paragraphs from an article by Pastor Art Sims state it well. We quote:

"From Rev. 1:10 we believe that the Apostle John was transported by the Spirit into the future 'Day of the Lord' and was instructed to write down what he saw. What did he write? Did he write only about what will happen *after* the Tribulation, or did he write about events in the Tribulation too? Remember, he wrote what he saw in 'the Day of the Lord.'

"In Rev. 15 and 16 we have the seven bowls of the '*wrath of God,*' being poured out upon the earth. But we do not have Christ's coming at the battle of Armageddon until bowls numbers 6 and 7. This means at least 5 bowls of God's wrath are poured out *before* the tribulation comes to an end. Furthermore, these bowls are said to 'fill up' (15:1) the '*wrath of God,*' which clearly shows that they inaugurate the conclusion of something that will already have been going on. How then can it possibly be held that the wrath of God will *only* come after the tribulation has ended?" (*Berean Searchlight*, Feb. 1979, P.342).

No, the rapture of the Body of Christ to be with Him will not follow the Tribulation; it will *precede* it. "*Wherefore comfort one another with these words*" (I

²⁹ Well do we remember the day when Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., U. S. Secretary of State and the U. S. delegate to the opening conference of the *United Nations*, April 25, 1945, opened the conference with a declaration that the nations now needed more than peace; they needed *peace and security*. He then requested "a few moments of -- silent *meditation!*"

[Thes. 4:18](#)) and continue joyfully to "serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven... who hath *delivered* us from the wrath to come" ([I Thes. 1:9,10](#)).

But we believe it can be further shown from Scripture that not only does "the day of the Lord" take us back before the "travail" of the tribulation period, but that it takes us back even to its beginning, for the first three and a half years of the Tribulation are *the introduction to the rest*.

Here we must ask *what will cause* men to say "Peace and safety," in the early part of this 7-year period? Doubtless, Antichrist's success as a world leader. But then, after three and a half years, he will be fully manifested as he sits in the temple of God, posing as God ([II Thes. 2:4](#)), and *then* will come the horrors of the "great tribulation."

It should be observed that not all wars begin with battles, and God here begins to wage war on this Christ-rejecting world by simply letting them believe the big lie they have always wanted to believe.

How could this be stated any more clearly than it is in [II Thes. 2:7-12](#), part of which reads as follows:

"... they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie. That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

Thus, removing the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, God will give men up to Antichrist ([II Thes. 2:7,8](#)). This agrees with the words of our Lord in [John 5:43](#):

"I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive Me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive."

And, as we say, this takes us back to the *beginning* of the 7-year tribulation period, which ushers in the judgments of God for grace rejected.

All this, then, is included in "the day of the Lord" in its broader sense, for this is how God will begin to bring the day of man, or the "times of the Gentiles" to an end, and enthrone His beloved Son as "*King of kings and Lord of lords* ."

MAKING CERTAIN

"But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

"Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

"For they that sleep sleep in the night, and they that be drunken are drunken in the night,

"But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

"Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do."

I Thes. 5:4-11

As if the Apostle had not shown clearly enough the distinction between our Lord's coming to catch His own away and His subsequent return to earth to reign, he proceeds still further to emphasize this distinction. This is undoubtedly an indication of the importance of the subject and justifies the author of this volume in dealing with it as comprehensively as he has sought to do.

The word "But," repeated in Ver. 4, re-emphasizes this distinction. "The day of the Lord" will overtake *them*, the Christ-rejecting world, "as a thief in the night," but the members of the Body of Christ belong to a different category altogether -- not merely because they are saved and the world about them is not, but because they will not be here during the "night" of the Tribulation.

NIGHT AND DAY

Some have likened Vers. 4,5 here to the case of the Israelites in Egypt during the "thick darkness" of the 9th "plague." For the Egyptians there was "thick darkness" for "three days," but all the while "the children of Israel had light in their dwellings" ([Ex. 10:21-23](#)).

But these two cases are not exactly parallel, for the darkness and light in the case of Israel and Egypt were *simultaneous*, the Israelites enjoying light *while* the Egyptians suffered the darkness. But here, in I Thes 5:4,5 the day and night are *consecutive*; the night *following* the day. The Apostle, in exhorting us to "comfort one another" with the truth of the Rapture, says not one word about God helping, or protecting us through the Tribulation. And would he not have done so if the Rapture *followed* the Tribulation?

We believe that the ordinary reader of I Thes. 4:15-18 and I Thes. 5:1-3 would naturally recognize them as *successive*, not concurrent, events, our Lord *first* coming to take His own out of the world and *then* judging it. This agrees with what the Apostle says here about the night and the day, for it is *after* this blessed day of grace, this "day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:1,2) has been brought to a close by the rapture of the Church, that this world will be plunged into the dark night of the Tribulation.

Thus Paul is not merely saying that "we" are of the light while "they" are of the darkness, but that since we are "the children of the day" and "not of the *night*" (Ver. 5), we belong to another category entirely. We will have been "caught up" and "the day of salvation" will have been brought to a close when the thief comes "in the night" to plunder this Christ-rejecting world.

And it is on *this* basis that we are exhorted not to sleep but to watch and be sober (Ver. 6). We are not instructed to be awake and ready to repel the thief, for the day of the Lord *cannot* overtake us as a thief, for the simple reason that the day of the Lord will come (as a thief in the night) *after* we have been caught away (I Thes. 5:4,5). Thus the Apostle exhorts us to "watch and be sober" for the best of all reasons: because the dark night of the Tribulation has not yet come and for us it is still day.

"... we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

"THEREFORE let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (I Thes. 5:5,6).

According to Ver. 7, nighttime is the time when people sleep or indulge in revelry, but for us it is not night, thus

"... let us, who are of the day, be sober,³⁰ putting on the breast-plate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation" (Ver. 8).

How reassuring: faith and love are a breastplate for the heart, and the hope of salvation a helmet for the head, and thus,

"The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7).

But what is this "hope of salvation" of which he speaks in Ver. 8? Is it our salvation from the penalty of sin? Not exactly; it is our salvation from "the wrath to come" and, indeed, our *complete* salvation (Cf., Rom. 8:23; 13:11), for again he refers to the coming of the Lord for us:

³⁰ Mentally and emotionally under control. The opposite of drunken.

"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain *salvation* by our *Lord Jesus Christ*,

"Who *died* for us, *that, whether* we wake or *sleep*³¹ we *should live together with Him*" (Vers. 9, 10).

³¹ Cf. 4:15-17, the living and the dead.

Chapter VII - I Thessalonians 5:12-28

CLOSING EXHORTATIONS

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD OUR SPIRITUAL LEADERS

"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;

"And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves."

--I Thes. 5:12,13

The closing words of Paul's *First Epistle to the Thessalonians* are filled with sound, practical exhortations we all should take to heart. There is in most, or all, of us the natural tendency to be interested in the wonderful things the Spirit has prepared for us, but to lose interest when He begins applying these blessed truths, practically, to our conduct. It is the course of wisdom, however, as well as of due humility, to give to these admonitions our most thoughtful and prayerful attention.

In Vers. 12,13 above, the Apostle deals with the believer's relationship to his spiritual leaders, and exhorts him to "recognize" them and to "*esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.*"

In a day of disrespect for authority it is natural that so many look upon the Church as a sort of democracy, in which all are equal. But this is unscriptural and wrong. Only before God are we all equal, not in our relationships with each other. Nor even, can we accept the position of the so-called *Plymouth Brethren* here, much as we love and respect them. They say, "Let the *Spirit* take charge," and so sit silently in their worship services, waiting for the Spirit to lead someone to speak. This sounds good, but it is not Scriptural, as we shall see, nor is it realistic, for it must be evident to some who regularly attend such meetings that some who have spoken were *not* led of the Holy Spirit. And those who conduct their services in this way leave the door wide open to the flesh, rather than the Spirit of God, to take control.

Considering the Scriptures on this subject, we may begin right here in I Thes. 5:12, where the Apostle refers to those who are "over you in the Lord," and admonishes the believers to "know"³² them and "*to esteem them very highly, in love.*" Indeed, in Ver. 14 he gives instructions to "*warn them that are unruly.*" In Heb. 13:17 he goes even further into detail as he says:

³² Gr., *eido*; to recognize them as "over you."

"Obey them that have *the rule over you, and submit yourselves*"

In Eph. 4:11 it is stated that our ascended Lord "gave... *some* pastors and teachers"; not one now and another then, as the Spirit may lead, but *certain* men whom He has *called* to be "pastors and teachers." This receives further emphasis in I Corinthians, also written at a time when the gifts of the Spirit were still in order. In I Cor. 12:28 the Apostle says: "And GOD HATH SET SOME in the Church," and among these are "teachers," recognized teachers, set there *by God*, which certainly does not suggest a congregation waiting for someone to rise and speak as *he* feels led of the Spirit. And Ver. 29 continues, "*Are all . . . teachers...?*" clearly indicating that *certain individuals* are called of God to this ministry. It is natural, even among believers, to desire the pre-eminence, but both those in authority and those who are asked to submit to it should take to heart the familiar maxim: "How much we could accomplish if we didn't care who got the credit."

All this does not imply that God might not reveal some blessed truth to one who has never even gotten up on his feet to teach, but it does confirm what I Tim. 3:1 says about "*the office of a bishop.*"

Nothing is so dishonoring to God as self-will and confusion in the Church, and while we should indeed be Bereans and test what we hear by the Scriptures, it still remains that there should be order among us who stand for the same great doctrines, and loving respect for God-given authority.

In this day of rebellion and disrespect for authority we should take all this seriously to heart, for this is what *God* says about rank and authority in the Church.³³ Thus:

"... we beseech you, brethren, to know [recognize] them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;

"And to esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake, and [i.e., and *thus*] be at peace among yourselves" (Vers. 12,13).

There can be no peace where order and respect for authority are wanting. Such unruly conduct can breed only chaos. Thus the Apostle exhorts not only the overseers, but the "brethren" in general, to "*warn them that are unruly.*"

³³ The author goes into this subject more comprehensively in his commentary on *The Pastoral Epistles*, Pp. 28-34.

OUR RELATIONSHIP TOWARD EACH OTHER AND TOWARD THOSE WITHOUT

"Now we exhort your, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

"See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men."

- I Thes. 5:14,15

Grace will teach us to acknowledge those who are above us and to be patient and kind toward those who are below --and so to display the unity of the Body.

Thus the "unruly," those who do not recognize God-given authority, should be warned of the consequences of their conduct, upon themselves, upon the assembly as a whole, and upon the cause of Christ.

One of the author's pastor-friends commented wisely, recently, upon the vehement attack being waged by a young man upon the views of some of his elder brethren. Said the pastor: "He's so sure of himself. The very fact that some of our most godly leaders disagree with him should at least, I should think, give him pause."

This is true, and such an attitude will make a man a Berean in the true sense of the word, for there is a great difference between a headstrong attitude and that of a true Berean.

As to the "feeble-minded,"³⁴ many a congregation of believers includes one or more of these. And they too are members of the Body, less fortunate members, who ought indeed to receive kindly words of encouragement from those who are better off. In his earlier years the author was often touched to see a great man of God go out of his way to offer some word of cheer to such. They felt he was truly their friend--and indeed he was, never too "great" to be counted their friend.

Of the same character is the Apostle's exhortation to "*support the weak.*" In Rom. 15:1 he says,

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

Indeed, concerning those he sought to win for Christ, he said:

³⁴ Some would render the Greek *oligopsuchos* 'fainthearted,' or 'despondent,' but "feeble-minded" appears to agree better with the context, followed as it is by "*support the weak.*"

"To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some" (I Cor. 9:22).

And his "be patient toward all men" indicates that this attitude of humility and grace should extend not only toward each other, but to all. Truly, "*love suffereth long, and is kind*" (I Cor. 13:4). Thus he concludes this section with the exhortation:

"See that none render evil for evil unto any man ..."

This again is the responsibility, not only of the pastor, but of the whole congregation. Setting the proper example themselves, *they* should *admonish* the unruly, and *see to it* that evil is not rendered for evil, lest sores in the assembly fester and evil breed more of the same.

And there is that word *dioko*, "follow," again:³⁵

"... ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and toward all men" (Ver. 15).

It would be a great "safety ingredient" in any congregation if its members would *flee* those things which cause rebellion, malice and ill-will, and would *pursue* mutual love and understanding.

CLOSING COUNSEL

"Rejoice evermore.

"Pray without ceasing.

"In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

"Quench not the Spirit.

"Despise not prophesying.

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

"Abstain from all appearance of evil.

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it.

³⁵ Lit., to *pursue*, as the hunter after his quarry.

"Brethren pray for us.

"Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.

"I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen."

--I Thes. 5:16-28

REJOICE, PRAY, GIVE THANKS

Is it not remarkable that the very first of these final one-sentence exhortations is, *"Rejoice evermore!"* Nor need adversity hinder our rejoicing, for we should see ourselves as God sees us, *in Christ*, "accepted" and "beloved." Thus the Apostle exhorts the Philipplians saints:

"Rejoice *in the Lord* always; and again I say, Rejoice" (Phil. 4:4).

When we consider all we have and all we are *in Christ*, we have abundant reason to *"rejoice evermore,"* even as Paul himself did as, when burdened and oppressed by cares and harassed by persecution, he represented himself as *"sorrowful, yet always rejoicing"* (II Cor. 6:10). A happy, thankful heart will go a long way toward making our service for Christ the more rewarding.

The exhortation to *"pray without ceasing"* should not be taken to mean that we should pray *continuously--this* would be impossible but that we should never cease to pray, should never quit praying. How great a blessing is God's invitation to free access into His presence, so graciously extended to us! (See Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:18; Heb. 4:16). And what a balm for the weary and afflicted to be able to *"enter into the holiest* by the blood of Jesus," and *"with thanksgiving,"* to *"let [our] requests be made known unto God!"* Talking to Him from the heart in this way is the next greatest blessing to letting Him talk to us from *His* heart in the Scriptures.

The words "give thanks," in Ver. 18, include the thought of *delight*.³⁵ We should delight with gratitude to let Him have His way with us 'in everything.' This is His will 'in Christ Jesus' concerning us. And, remember, it was 'in Christ Jesus' that His whole great plan of salvation centered. Thus as He delights in *us -- charis* is the very word for "grace" -- we should gratefully delight in His delight of *us -- mutual delight!* And this should be so *no matter what the circumstances*, for what we have and are *in Christ* does not change.

³⁵ Gr., *eucharisteo*, to give thanks with delight. From *charis*, that which gives pleasure or delight.

QUENCH NOT--DESPISE NOT PROVE ALL THINGS

Some have viewed with great disfavor the very idea that the working of the Holy Spirit can be resisted or hindered in any way. Perhaps these have forgotten that God created man in His own image, with the power to think, to plan, to decide. And though this image was defaced through the fall, it has not been *effaced*, for it is of man in his *present* condition that the Apostle declares: "*He is the image and glory of God*" (I Cor. 11:7).

Thus even the believer may *neglect* to give the Spirit free reign in his life (I Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 1:6), or may *grieve* the Spirit (Eph. 4:30), or may *quench* His working, in himself or, as may appear from Ver. 20, through others.

The gift of prophecy was still in order when Paul wrote his letters to the Thessalonians. Indeed, to the Corinthians he wrote at an even later date:

"Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy" (I Cor. 14:1).

"Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues" (Ver. 39).³⁶

This was because *all* the truths of the "mystery" had not yet been revealed, and the written Word of God was not yet complete. Thus God still often communicated His Word by the mouths of saints, who could say, "*Thus saith the Lord*," as the Spirit gave them utterance. We today, by comparison, can only say "Thus saith the Lord," as we point to the written Word.

In the days of the Thessalonians, therefore, one might quench the Spirit by despising the prophecy of some brother in Christ. It did not follow, however, that anything such a brother might say was indeed the word of the Lord, thus the Apostle continues: "*Prove [test] all things; hold fast to that which is good*" (I Thes. 5:21; cf. I Cor. 2:15; Phil. 4:8).

GOD IS FAITHFUL--WE SHOULD BE

"Abstain from all appearance of evil" (Ver. 22).

Some have rendered the word *eidos*, here, "form," rather than "appearance." But again we believe the KJV translators had a better perception of the sense of this exhortation.

³⁶ It must not be overlooked, however, that already the Apostle was predicting that the gifts of *both* prophecy and tongues were to be "done away." (See I Cor. 13:8).

If it had meant "every form of evil," a stronger word than "abstain" would have been used with regard to it, for there are many vicious forms of evil which we should not merely back away from, but *flee from*. Also, the word *eidos*, here rendered "appearance," basically signifies that which strikes the eye. Thus, says the Apostle, abstain from anything that even looks like evil, for if you indulge in it you will bear a poor testimony for Christ. An illustration might be that of the deacon who sat drinking a bottle of soda pop in front of a saloon! Immediately word got around that he had begun "drinking"! So careful must we be about our Christian conduct. It is with this in mind that the Apostle utters the benediction:

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it" (Vers. 23,24).

It was the Apostle's deep desire that, being wholly consecrated to God, their whole spirit and soul and body³⁷ might be preserved blameless until the Lord's coming for them (Ver. 23; cf., [I Cor. 1:8](#); [I Thes. 3:13](#)).

And he adds the comforting truth that the One who called them is faithful; He will keep His word to them (Ver. 24; cf., [I Cor. 1:9](#); [Phil. 1:6](#)). It should not be overlooked that in this connection Paul calls God "*the very God of peace*" (Ver. 23), for it is only as God sanctifies us wholly to Himself that we can enjoy true peace and felicity. He makes the same connection in Heb. 13:20,21, where he utters a benediction:

"Now *the God of peace* . . . make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

And now the Apostle asks the Thessalonian saints to pray for him. How often he makes this request in his epistles!

He was a man of like passions as others, liable to the same temptations, engaged in a God-given ministry which called forth Satan's bitterest enmity, often exposed to the gravest perils. Moreover, he was *not* the bold person that many have thought him to be. A dozen Scriptures bear witness to this fact, and he freely admitted it ([I Cor. 1:3](#)), and asked others to help by praying for him ([Eph. 6:18-20](#)).

THE HOLY KISS

"Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss" (I Thes. 5:26).

³⁷ It has always puzzled this writer how some great men of God can, in the light of the written Word, hold that man is composed only of an inner man and an outer man. Here the Apostle clearly outlines man's composition as "your *whole* spirit and soul and body," while Heb. 4:12 declares that "the Word of God" even "*divides asunder*," the "*soul and spirit*."

This passage calls for special attention. Many have written on it at length and, in general, have come to two basic conclusions:

1. Since greeting one another with a kiss was evidently a custom of that time and place--as it is in *some* lands today (e.g., France, Russia, Italy, the Middle East)--this passage does not bind us to greet each other precisely in this way any more than the washing of the saints' feet would here and now qualify a Christian widow for the "widow's pension" (See [I Tim. 5:10](#)).

2. In any case, the passage is written directly to and about the "brethren," and does not teach or sanction promiscuous kissing.

Perhaps the context of a parallel passage in I Cor. 16:20 will illustrate how this admonition involves much more than mere technicalities about a mode of greeting.

First, Verse 19, of I Cor. 16, says:

"The churches of Asia [in Asia Minor] salute you."

Paul had doubtless told the believers at these churches about the great work which God had done at Corinth, and it is possible that he had asked them to remember the Corinthian believers in their prayers. And now, the brethren from all these "Asian" churches had asked Paul to send their greetings to the Corinthian believers. And the Apostle continues:

"Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house."

Aquila and Priscilla were the beloved tentmakers who had given Paul a home and employment when he first came to Corinth ([Acts 18:3](#)). They had witnessed the founding of this great congregation, observing at close range, God's blessing on Paul's ministry there and must often have discussed this with the members of "the church . . . in their house." And now *they* all joined Aquila and Priscilla in sending their very special ("much") greetings.

Then, Ver. 20: *"All the brethren greet you. . ."*

It is against this background that the Apostle continues:

"Greet ye one another..."

The churches of Asia send their greetings, Aquila and Priscilla send their very special greetings, the church in their house also sends its greetings. Indeed, *all* the brethren greet you. Now, *greet ye one another!* with emphasis on the "ye."

Have you ever attended a church where the atmosphere was cold and forbidding? No one said, "Good morning; I'm glad to see you," or gave you a warm, friendly handshake. After the service all filed out, barely speaking to each other, much less to you. Did you feel like ever again attending that church?

Such a congregation, evidently, had the church at Corinth become. First, they had not grown in grace or in the knowledge of the Word and had to be fed with "milk," like little babies, unable to digest the solid food of Scripture.

As a result there were contentions among them, as the various cliques in the congregation championed their favorite preachers and downgraded the others. They were "puffed up *for* one against another," each feeling that he was best qualified to judge. Some boasted of their spiritual gifts, others took brethren to court before unbelievers, while still others profaned what should have been a precious communion service, spreading feasts in the church for themselves and their friends, while others had little or nothing. Furthermore, they were anything but generous with their God-given funds and were often most inconsiderate of one another, while their women spoke out boldly right in the church services and all were, in general, poor examples of the love and grace of God.

Everyone, it seemed, was doing "his thing," and *not* in love. This was the kind of congregation where the individual members would not be apt to greet each other warmly -- except within each clique. Rather, there were undercurrents of suspicion and bad feeling, and unkind gossip and criticism.

Hoping now that his earnest exhortations would speak to their hearts, the Apostle says in effect: All here and throughout "Asia" send their greetings to you. Now "greet ye one another--*and do it heartily* (i.e., "with an holy kiss").

How this should speak to assemblies where true brotherly love has vanished! "Greet ye one another with a warm, hearty handshake," he would doubtless say to us today.

In many a church the members greet each other with a word or a nod, but this alone can even *increase* the coldness of the atmosphere. As Jim enters the door he sees Joe, whom he cannot abide. "Morning Joe," he says, and Joe responds in kind, as both go their ways saying to themselves, "*That* was a cold greeting!"

It might have been quite different had Jim given Joe a warm greeting and a hearty handshake along with his "Good morning." Then Joe might well have responded heartily and both would have felt better about each other.

This, in the light of the context, is what the Apostle meant by his exhortation: "Greet ye one another with an holy kiss." *Greet one another warmly and heartily,*" the word "holy" emphasizing the sincerity of the greeting. This we take to be the meaning of I Thes. 5:26.

Finally comes the Apostle's injunction that this letter be read to *all* the congregation. The importance of this will be seen as we consider Paul's second epistle to them, for already there was an incipient problem that threatened to gather momentum.

And again the closing benediction:

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you" (Ver. 28).

How overwhelmed was the Apostle's heart with the infinite grace of God to *him*, the chief of sinners, to a *world* of sinners, and to the members of a so-unworthy Church! Opening and closing his epistles with benedictions of grace, and constantly treating of the various aspects of God's grace to sinners and to saints, he was pre-eminently *the Apostle of grace*, raised up to usher in the present "*dispensation of the grace of God.*"

INTRODUCTION

to

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS

As we examine the *Second Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians* we find that there was still much among them to be commended. Unlike those at Corinth, they had grown in grace: their faith had "grown exceedingly," and their love for one another "abounded" (1:3). Not only that, but they were enduring fierce persecution with "patience and faith" (1:4).

When Paul wrote his first letter to them he wrote in part, evidently, to allay their fears that those of their loved ones who had died in Christ might thus miss the Rapture. Explaining the plan of God as to this, he pointed out that the Rapture would include the *whole* Body of Christ, both living and dead, and that it would *precede* the Day of the Lord and the outpouring of His wrath.

Evidently erroneous teaching as to this latter was already incipient at **Thessalonica** at this time, that he should write on it so emphatically as he did in I Thes. 4 and 5.

By now this teaching had gained ground, however, and with persecution raging, some of them had been led to believe that the Day of the Lord was "at hand" (**II Thes. 2:2**). Indeed, it seems that a letter had even been forged, to make it appear that Paul himself now taught this (2:2).

It may well be that those who thus confused the Thessalonian brethren were Jewish believers. Jewish hopes had been earthly in sphere, and they may well have confused the Rapture with our Lord's return to reign on earth at the close of the Tribulation. And since Paul evidently expected to be alive at the Rapture (**I Thes. 4:17**) they apparently concluded that the Day of the Lord had already begun. It would follow from this, of course, that they would be called upon to endure the most horrible sufferings this world has ever known or ever will know until that time (**Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21**). Only *after* this pouring out of the bowls of God's wrath, the argument went, would the Lord come to receive His own to Himself.

It is this error that the Apostle refutes in the strongest terms in his second letter to the Thessalonian saints.

How grateful we should be that we have *both* the Thessalonian Epistles in our Bible, for with the world drawing ever closer to the judgments that will follow the dispensation of grace, and with wars and frightening weapons of war seemingly threatening our very existence, it is not strange that the "Post-tribulation" theory has re-appeared in our day.

II Thessalonians, however, along with I Thessalonians, clearly teaches that our Lord's coming to catch His own out of this world is the *prior* hope of the members of the Body of Christ and that the Tribulation will *not* – *cannot* – begin until after the Rapture of the Body.

Chapter I - II Thessalonians 1:1-12

GRACE AND PEACE – JUDGMENT AND WAR

GRACE AND PEACE

"Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

"Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

"So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure."

--II Thes. 1:1-4

The first two chapters of II Thessalonians again give the members of the Body of Christ strong assurance that they will not be engulfed in the coming Tribulation and the pouring out of the bowls of God's wrath.

For one thing, this epistle, like the earlier one, opens with the benediction:

"Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"³⁷ (Ver. 2).

Note: He pens this blessed benediction without any word of warning, comfort, or encouragement concerning "the day of [God's] wrath," evidently because they have no connection with this. Certainly, if they were to be called upon to go through the prophesied Tribulation, the omission of such comfort and encouragement would be unforgivable.

For another thing, these verses speak of a growing ministry of *grace*, not a last stand against the forces of evil such as will be taken by the remnant in the Tribulation.

If the Apostle rejoiced in their faith, and love and hope, when he wrote his first epistle to them (I Thes. 1:2,3), how much more cause he had for rejoicing now, as,

³⁷ For further comments on Verses 1 and 2, see the author's notes on I Thes. 1:1.

in the midst of bitter persecution, their faith had grown "exceedingly," their love toward each other "abounded," and they endured their persecutions and tribulations in "patience and faith."

God had used these persecutions and afflictions to strengthen them spiritually, to increase their faith, to quicken their zeal, to deepen their joy.

It has never been otherwise. Toil, suffering and sacrifice are hardly looked upon by the world as ingredients for happiness. Prosperity, pleasure and security are what men seek. But "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth," and worldly ease and pleasure are but "for a season." To give ourselves in sacrifice to Him who gave Himself for us -- this is the secret of spiritual blessing. True, persecution and its attendant afflictions are not easy to endure, but they can be blessedly sanctified by the grace of God as we bear them patiently. This is beautifully brought out in Rom. 5:2-5:

".. . [We] rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

"And not only so, but we glory in *tribulations* also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

"And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

"And hope maketh not ashamed, because *the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*"

And this is only the beginning.

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (II Cor. 4:17).

Thus the Apostle could "boast"³⁸ of the Thessalonian believers among the other churches, as they patiently endured their tribulations.

JUDGMENT AND WAR

"Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God,³⁹ for which ye also suffer:

"Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;

³⁸ The Greek *kaukaomai* is variously rendered "glory," "boast" and "rejoice," in the *King James Version*.

³⁹ This term does not conflict with the term, "the Body of Christ." Has there not always been the kingdom of God? Paul, as well as other Bible writers, speaks of believers being in this kingdom and unbelievers being excluded from it (Rom. 14:17; Eph. 5:5; Col. 1:13; II Thes. 1:5).

"And to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,

"In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

"Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and tram the glory of His power;

"When He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day."

--II Thes. 1:5-10

The aggravation and hatred of the persecutors, while beholding the peace and joy of those they persecuted was *"a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God,"* (Vers. 4,5), for already the persecuted believers were better off than their persecutors! Note: this was but a "token," though a "manifest" one, of the actual judgment to come, when Vers. 6-10 will be fulfilled.

A comparison with Phil. 1:28, makes it appear further that this situation was a "manifest token" to *them*, the persecutors, of judgment to come. Mark well:

"... in nothing terrified by your adversaries; which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God."

"Their hearts and consciences are troubled with foreboding thoughts as they see your constancy," says the Apostle, "while you are encouraged with the assurance that He who sustains you now will bring you through victorious."

Their present situation, we say, was but "a . . . token of the righteous judgment of God," for the judgment itself was still to come. Note:

"Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense *tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest with us.* when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels" (Vers. 6,7).

Ah, again the truth is emphasized: When the Lord Jesus comes from heaven with His mighty angels (i.e., in judgment) *they* the unbelievers, will be suffering "tribulation," while the hated believers will be enjoying "*rest--with us.*" Paul had no doubts about what his own circumstances would be at that time!

Note further: their present situation was also "a manifest token" to them, the believers, that it is only just of God to repay tribulation to those who trouble His

people, and to themselves, "rest,"⁴⁰ glorious rest, with Christ and His redeemed ones.

Thus the passage in Phil. 1 goes on to show that persecution is not to be counted a calamity, but an honor and a privilege:

"For unto you *it is* given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Ver. 29).

Before proceeding to the judgment to be meted out in the Tribulation, we should observe that all this again indicates that the Rapture of the members of Christ's Body will mark the close of the day of grace and usher in the day of judgment.

God will not allow the rejection of His beloved Son to go on forever. The present dispensation of grace will not continue on indefinitely. It has lasted now for more than 1900 years, but He *will* bring it to a close and speak to this Christ-rejecting world in His wrath ([Psa. 2:5](#); [I Thes. 5:3](#); [II Thes. 1:6-9](#)). Almost twenty centuries ago, the world declared war on God ([Psa. 2:1-3](#)), and if anything is clear in Scripture it is the fact that He *will* make a counter-declaration of war on them. As now, for all this time, He has proclaimed "*grace and peace*," He will then "*judge and make war*" ([Gal. 1:3,4](#); cf., [Rev. 19:11](#)). Ponder thoughtfully, unbeliever: *war* is the extreme opposite of *peace*, and *judgment* the opposite of *grace*, and we are now living in the tense moments between the declaration of war by one power and a counter-declaration by the other, moments in which God, loathe to judge, graciously sends us forth as ambassadors on enemy territory, to offer reconciliation to all who will place their trust in the rejected Christ. Thus we cannot offer you grace for tomorrow: "*NOW is the accepted time . . . NOW is the day of salvation*" ([II Cor. 6:2](#)).

Is it not interesting in this connection that, not only did our Lord reveal Himself to Paul from heaven, but He revealed Himself *to the world* through Paul! In [Gal. 1:12](#) the Apostle says that he received his message '*by the revelation of Jesus Christ*,' but in [Vers. 15, 16](#) he says ". . . it pleased God . . . to reveal His Son in me." What a revelation to the world was the saving of Saul, God's blaspheming enemy, His chief enemy on earth! Surely He thus displayed His grace to show *all* men that He desires them to be at peace with Him; that He desires them to be reconciled to Him ([II Cor. 5:20,21](#)).

But, as we have indicated, the Lord Jesus Christ will not be forever revealed to this world in grace. Some day -- who knows how soon? He will be revealed to the world in His glory, "*to judge and make war*." Or, as [II Thes. 1:7,8](#) has it:

"... the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,

⁴⁰ Not rest from toil, but rest from harassment and persecution.

"In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH AND THE DISOBEDIENCE OF UNBELIEF

Surely Vers. 8 and 9 of II Thes. 1 should prevent the serious reader from supposing that God is some kind of a benevolent being who can be forever depended upon for love and forgiveness. We read here that He and "His mighty angels" will come.. .

"In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ;

"Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power."

It is not the unbeliever's misfortune that He does not know God; it is his *sin*.

All through history it has been "*the obedience of faith*" that has saved men. When God says: "*Offer an animal sacrifice and I will accept you,*" what will faith do? Faith will bring the required sacrifice and will be accepted (See [Gen. 4:4](#) and [Heb. 11:4](#)). When God says, "*Obey My voice indeed and you will be Mine*" ([Ex. 19:5](#)), what will faith do? It will surely seek to obey His voice indeed ([Psa. 1:1-3](#)) and will be counted among God's people. When God says, "*Repent, and be baptized for the remission of sins*" ([Acts 2:38](#)), what will faith do? It will repent and be baptized and receive the remission of sins.

And when God says, "*BUT NOW the righteousness of God without the law is manifested* ([Rom. 3:21](#)) and "*To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness*" ([Rom. 4:5](#)), "*Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*" ([Rom. 3:24](#)) -- when God says this, what will faith do? Faith will accept the gracious offer and trust Christ alone for salvation -- and thus be saved.⁴¹ This is all "*the obedience of faith.*"

At both the beginning and the end of Paul's great epistle to the Romans he declares that the gospel to which he had been separated was to be declared among all nations "*for the obedience of faith*" ([Rom. 1:1,5; 16:25,26](#)). This gospel has by the infinite grace of God, been widely proclaimed now for more than nineteen centuries, and all who have exercised "*the obedience of faith,*"⁴² have thus come to *know God*. But what shall be the just judgment of those—guilty

⁴¹ Chapter I of the author's *Things That Differ* goes into this subject more comprehensively.

⁴² It should not be taken lightly that "*God... hath spoken,*" ([Heb. 1:1,2](#)), and to turn a deaf ear is the grossest disobedience and rebellion.

sinners, all of them -- who reject the grace so dearly purchased for them! These, He says,

"... shall be punished with everlasting destruction⁴³ from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power" (Ver. 9).

Note the repetition of the word *"from"* here: "Everlasting destruction *from* the presence of the Lord." This will be a horrible fate. When Cain was driven from the face of the Lord, he said, *"My punishment is greater than I can bear"* (Gen. 4:13,14). Again, "destruction... *from* the glory of His power." His power then will be no help to them, as it has been for so many believing saints. Gone forever will be the days when they could trust Christ and know "the glory of His power."

CHRIST GLORIFIED IN HIS SAINTS AND ADMIRER IN ALL THEM THAT BELIEVE

Again the Apostle contrasts the glorious prospect of the believing Thessalonians with the ignominious fate of their unbelieving persecutors, for remember, Paul hoped to be alive at the Lord's coming for His own. But his word to them is also God's Word to us.

All the vengeance and punishment referred to in Vers. 6-9 will take place on earth,

"When He [the Lord Jesus Christ] shall come⁴⁴ to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day" (Ver. 10).

Ponder thoughtfully. While unbelievers are banished from His presence and glory, our Lord will be glorified and admired *in us--because we believed His Word.*⁴⁵ As the artist or the sculptor is honored and admired because of the work of his hands; as men gaze at his workmanship and lavish praise upon *him*: as the philanthropist is honored and admired for all the good he has done for others; as men see his philanthropic projects and lavish praise upon *him*, so one day, angels and men will gaze upon our Lord's masterpiece,⁴⁶ "the Church, which is His Body," and "admire" and "glorify" *Him*.

How can we close this portion of our studies in II Thessalonians without calling to mind the "grace aspect"?

⁴³ Destruction is by no means annihilation, as some have taught. To destroy is to ruin, to do irreparable injury, to render permanently unfit for intended use. Thus "everlasting destruction," above. (See the author's, *Man, His Nature and Destiny*, Pp. 206, 207).

⁴⁴ Lit., "shall have come" (T.R.).

⁴⁵ Here many "Calvinists" should stop and consider, and compare this statement with II Thes. 2:10-12.

⁴⁶ This is the sense of Eph. 2:10.

"That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus*" (Eph. 2:7).

WE CAN BEGIN TO GLORIFY HIM NOW

"Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power.

"That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

--II Thes. 1:11,12

How profoundly grateful we should be to God,

"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and [His own] grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (II Tim. 1:9).

This gratitude should be expressed in our daily walk. Thus, as the Apostle exhorts believers in Eph. 4:1-3 to walk worthy of their calling, so here he assures the Thessalonian believers of his unceasing prayers that *God* might count them worthy of "this calling," i.e., that their walk might be such that *He* can approve it.

And as he assures the Colossian believers of his prayers that they "might be *filled with the knowledge of [God's] will,*" and so "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being *fruitful* in every good work" (Col. 1:9,10), so here, having taught the Thessalonian believers how to "rightly divide" the Word of truth, from the Old Testament revelation of the coming kingdom, to the "mystery," or secret, most recently vouched safe to him, he prays that they might "*Fulfill all the good pleasure of [God's] will, and the work of faith with power*" (II Thes. 1:11; cf. II Tim. 2:15).

And all this, he says, "*that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him...*" (Ver. 12).

Ponder thoughtfully: One day our blessed Lord *will* "be *glorified* in His saints and *admired* in all them that believe," (1:10, but His name should be *glorified in us now*, to the fullest possible extent, "according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

What a challenge to faith! By grace He may be *glorified* and *admired* in us *now!* May this be our goal.

Chapter II - II Thessalonians 2:1-3

FIRST THE DEPARTURE

AN APPEAL TO THE FALTERING

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him,

"That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.⁴⁷

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition."

II Thes. 2:1-3

LET NO MAN DECEIVE YOU BY ANY MEANS

The Apostle's appeal to the Thessalonian saints not to be "shaken," or "troubled," or "deceived. . . by any means," is based upon the truth of the Rapture.

It was "by" or *on the basis of "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and⁴⁸ our gathering together unto Him,"* that he begged them not to falter.

This was their "blessed hope," and he besought them not to let any man take it from them either "by spirit" (i.e., the supposed gift of prophecy), or "by word" (i.e., argument) or "by letter as from us"⁴⁹ (Ver. 2).

Of all the strong evidences in the Thessalonian epistles that the rapture of believers to be with Christ will *precede* the Tribulation, the opening verses of II Thes. 2 are certainly the strongest.

NOT ONE SCRIPTURE?

One Bible teacher has declared that "there is not one verse of Scripture which explicitly affirms the rapture of the Church before the Tribulation."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Or "of the Lord is present."

⁴⁸ Note: In KJV the second "by" is printed in italics, indicating that it was supplied by the translators. The Apostle refers to *one* event, not two.

⁴⁹ It appears that a letter, or letters, had actually been forged to make it appear that he believed that the Rapture would *follow* the Tribulation.

⁵⁰ Henry T. Hudson, in *Re-examination of Pretribulationism*, P. 2.

But why need there be? There is "not one verse of Scripture which explicitly affirms" that our Lord was baptized before His temptation by the devil, or that He was crowned with thorns before He was crucified, or that baptism with water is no longer included in God's program for believers, or that God is a Trinity. Yet there is abundant Scriptural proof for all these, and the brother referred to above accepts them all as the truth of the Word of God.

Some time ago one of the author's "post-trib." friends wrote to him:

"The great tribulation is not pleasant to anticipate -- this is a fact (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21,22). But in the light of [a series of Scripture passages] I know by God's grace and strength I can endure the greatest torture or the most gruesome death. Perhaps, brother, I will be called upon one day to prove my word. God only knows. I can rest only in Him (II Tim. 1:7). Paul went through much, as did many first-century Christians. To those individuals, tortured and killed, the pain they suffered could not be any worse than the saints will suffer as individuals in the great tribulation. Praise God for our great and glorious hope, I Tim. 1:1."

How sad this is in view of the following three facts:

1. Paul, in speaking of the Rapture *never* says one word to prepare the saints for the horrors of the Tribulation. We may be certain that he would have done so if they were to endure its terrors *before* being caught up to be with Christ.

2. Our Lord, in speaking to His "kingdom" followers *did* say much to them about the coming Tribulation, but *not one word* about their being "caught up" to meet Him in the air.

3. Thus, the rapture of believers to be with Christ, is distinctively the hope of the Body of Christ, for which Paul repeatedly urges us to be "looking" and "waiting," encouraging one another in the anticipation of this "blessed hope" ([Tit. 2:13](#)).

But wait! There *is* indeed one blessed passage of Scripture which "explicitly affirms" that the Rapture will precede the Tribulation. It is [II Thes. 2:3](#).

Our respect and admiration for the *King James Version* grows more profound each year. We believe that KJV stands head and shoulders above all other English translations, and perhaps above *all* other translations in any language. It is in the truest sense a *faithful* translation. Also, we believe that God has graciously preserved the Greek Scriptures for us in *Textus Receptus*, the *Received Text* of the New Testament, rightly called the *Majority Text*, the text upon which KJV is substantially based.

Yet here is a case where the KJV translators departed from *Textus Receptus*, for TR does not contain the words "a falling away" in II Thes. 2:3, but the words "*the departure,*" Gr., *hee apostasia*. Thus the verse actually reads:

"Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come except *the departure* come first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition."

There is abundant evidence for this rendering, as we shall now proceed to prove.

APOSTASIA AND APOSTASY

First, our English word *apostasy*, is *not* an exact equivalent of the Greek *apostasia*. The English word *apostasy* means rebellion, or revolt, against a faith once embraced, but the Greek *apostasia* means *departure*, nothing more.

Actually the Greek noun *apostasia* occurs only once more in the New Testament, namely in [Acts 21:21](#), where Paul is informed of the report that he has taught "all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to *forsake* Moses."

We suggest that even here the word "depart" would be a closer synonym to the rendering "forsake" than would the word "apostatize." To forsake is not exactly to revolt or rebel against, and this is what our English word *apostasy* means. Furthermore, in this case we are told that it was reported that Paul urged these Jews to "forsake," or "depart from" Moses, and surely Paul did not urge them to any revolt against Moses or his writings. He merely pointed out that now, by grace, they were free from the Law, that the Law had been fulfilled for them by Christ.

In any case, the Record does not say that Paul had taught the Jews who lived among the Gentiles to "forsake" Moses. It says only that the Jews in Judaea had been "informed" that this was the case. This rumor was probably an exaggeration of what he actually had done in teaching that the Law had now been fulfilled by Christ and that believers are delivered from its curse ([Gal. 3:13](#)).

But while the noun *apostasia* occurs only twice in the New Testament, the *root verb* from which the noun is derived occurs 15 times, and its meaning is easy to determine. We refer to the verb *aphisteemi*. So that there may be no mistake, we present here a list of *every* New Testament use of this verb.

Luke 2:37: "*departed* not from the temple."

Luke 4:13: "the devil...*departed* from Him."

Luke 8:13: "in time of temptation *fall* away."

Luke 13:27: "*Depart* from Me, all ye workers of iniquity."

Acts 5:37: "*drew away* much people after him."

Acts 5:38: "*refrain* from these men."

Acts 12:10: "the angel *departed* from him."

Acts 15:38: "who *departed* from them from Pamphilia."

Acts 19:9: "he *departed* from them."

Acts 22:29: "they *departed* from him."

II Cor. 12:8: "I besought the Lord... that it might *depart* from me."

I Tim. 4: 1: "some shall *depart* from the faith."

I Tim. 6:5: "from such *withdraw* thyself."

II Tim. 2:19: "*depart* from iniquity."

Heb. 3:12: "in *departing* from the living God."

First, the reader should observe carefully that in 11 out of these 15 occurrences the verb in question is rendered *depart*, *departed*, or *departing*, while in the other four close synonyms are used.

Further, only three out of the 15 are concerned with departure *from the truth*. And in all three it is clearly stated that the departure is "*from the faith*" (I Tim. 4:1), "*from the living God*" (Heb. 3:12), and from that which was "*for a while believed*" (Luke 8:13), leaving the meaning of *the verb apisteemi* itself simply *depart* -- nothing more -- in *all 15 occurrences*.

In Luke 4:13 we read that the *devil* "departed" *from Christ*. In Acts 12:10 an *angel* "departs" *from Peter*. In Acts 15:38 we read that a man had "departed" *from Paul and Barnabas*. In II Cor. 12:8 we read of Paul's thrice-repeated prayer that a *thorn* might "depart," or be removed, *from his flesh*. And so with all the others. Indeed, in two of the 15 cases above the very *opposite* of apostasy or departure from the truth is involved. In I Tim. 6:5 Timothy is told to depart ("withdraw thyself") from men who are "*destitute of the truth*," while in II Tim. 2:19 all who "name the name of Christ" are exhorted to "*depart from iniquity*." Surely these were not instructions to *apostatize*.

Thus, bear it well in mind, *apisteemi*, the root verb of the Greek *apostasia*, means to depart -- nothing more. Later on we will discuss the particular "departure" referred to in II Thes. 2:3, but first the rendering "a falling away," as compared with "the departure," must be further discussed.

THE AUTHORIZED VERSION AND ITS PREDECESSORS

Kenneth S. Wuest, in his preface to II Thessalonians, says in part:

"If *apostasia* and *aphisteemi* meant what our word 'apostasy' and 'apostatize' mean, why did Paul, when using *aphisteemi* in I Timothy 4:1, feel the need of adding the qualifying phrase, 'from the faith' to complete the meaning of *aphisteemi* in that instance of its use? The word *apostasia*, therefore, in its original and pure meaning, unadulterated by the addition of other ideas imposed upon it by the contexts in which it has been used, means "a departure."

In explaining why the *King James Version* failed to retain the rendering "a departure," which they found in the five versions which preceded KJV, Mr. Wuest points out a technical mistake contained in all six versions. Says Mr. Wuest:

"The fatal mistake the translators made⁵¹ was in failing to take into consideration *the definite article* before the word *apostasia* ... "(*Ibid*). The article here denotes *previous reference*, for this wording clearly implies that they already know about it.

The meaning of Paul's words in II Thes. 2:3, then, is that before the Tribulation can come, the "man of sin" must be revealed, and before *this* can happen "the departure" must come "first."

WHAT DEPARTURE?

No "falling away" or "apostasy" had been previously mentioned in either epistle, but in the whole of I Thessalonians and also of II Thessalonians up to this point, the Apostle's very *theme* had been the rapture of the members of the Body of Christ. Thus here in II Thes. 2:3 he must be referring to "*the departure*" of the *Church to be with Christ*. This falls naturally into place with the whole context, for why should Paul exhort these believers not to be "shaken" or "troubled," merely because the apostasy must precede the Tribulation? This would be no comfort. Further, how could they recognize "the" apostasy, much less "a" falling away when it came? The fact is that apostasy is raging now, in our day; it *has been* throughout the Church's history. Indeed, it began in the days of Paul himself, and he wrote to Timothy, instructing *him* what to do about it. Thus "a falling away" could be no definite guidepost to the Thessalonian believers. But if, as we have contended, the beginning of the Tribulation awaits the rapture of the members of the Body of Christ, then the very fact that the Thessalonian saints were still on earth was in itself positive proof that the day of the Lord had not yet come.

⁵¹ The very fact that five other translations preceded KJV proves that translators *are* fallible!

CONCLUSION

1. The word *apostasia* and its root verb *aphisteemi*, do *not*, used by themselves, mean "apostasy" and "apostatize." They mean "departure" and "depart," nothing more.

2. II Thes. 2:3 states in the Greek, that the day of the Lord will not come "except *the departure* come first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition."

3. The term "*the departure*," with the definite article, denotes previous reference.

4. Paul had written to the Thessalonians in his previous letter about the departure of the members of Christ's Body from this earth (I Thes. 4:16,17) and had even *disassociated* this from the prophesied "day of the Lord" with the use of the word, "But" in I Thes. 5:1. He had also referred to this "departure" in the phrase "*our gathering together unto Him*," in II Thes. 2:1. Indeed, this was the basis for his appeal to the Thessalonians not to be "shaken" or "troubled" by those who would lead them to believe that "the day of the Lord" had already begun. Also, he had "told" them about "these things" while he was yet with them (II Thes. 2:5).

5. "The man of sin" must also be manifested before the "day of the Lord" can come (II Thes. 2:3,4)⁵² and *he* cannot be manifested until "the departure" takes place "first."

6. Thus, in addition to many *clear proofs* that the rapture of the Body will precede the Tribulation we also have a passage which "*explicitly affirms*" this.

"WHEREFORE COMFORT ONE ANOTHER..." (I Thes. 4:18).

"BE NOT SOON SHAKEN IN MIND, OR... TROUBLED..." (II Thes. 2:2).

"LET NO MAN DECEIVE YOU BY ANY MEANS..." (II Thes. 2:3).

⁵² First as a great leader (Rev. 6:2) and then in all his blasphemy and wickedness (II Thes. 2:8).

Chapter III – II Thessalonians 2:4-17

THE SON OF PERDITION AND BRETHREN BELOVED OF THE LORD

STRONG DELUSION

"Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

"Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

"And now ye know what withholdeth that He might be revealed in his time.

"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only He who now letteth will let, until He be taken out of the way.

"And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming.

"Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders.

"And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

"And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.

"That they all might be damned who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

-- II Thes. 2:4-12

THE MAN OF SIN THE SON OF PERDITION

The above passage has to do with *"the man of sin... the son of perdition"* referred to in Verse 3, and to the just judgment of God in giving a Christ-rejecting world over to his deceit and power.

It is not difficult to identify this "man of sin" the "son of perdition" as the Antichrist, for Ver. 4 declares that he will "*sit in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*" This is said of Antichrist and is called by Daniel and our Lord, "*the abomination of desolation*" ([Dan. 9:27](#); [11:31](#); [12:11](#); [Matt. 24:15](#)).

Having made a seven-year covenant with Israel, Antichrist will break it after three and a half years, setting himself up in the rebuilt temple as God in the flesh ([Matt. 24:15](#)). This breach of contract will trigger the "*great tribulation*," concerning which our Lord said,

"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

"And except those days should be shortened,⁵³ there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" ([Matt. 24:15,21,22](#)).

JUDAS AND ANTICHRIST

It is a striking fact that only one other person in Scripture is called "*the son of perdition.*" Nor was he an ordinary person. Rather he lived in the very vortex of human history and daily walked and talked with our Lord and then betrayed Him to death with a kiss: *Judas Iscariot*. It was he of whom our Lord said,

"Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?"⁵⁴ ([John 6:70](#)).

Further, this is the one of whom our Lord said, in His high-priestly prayer,

"... those that Thou gavest Me have I kept, and none of them is lost, but the *son of perdition*; that the Scripture might be fulfilled" ([John 17:12](#)).

This has led some to conclude that "the son of perdition" of [II Thes. 2:3](#) and Judas Iscariot are one and the same, both being Satan incarnate. They believe that Judas will be brought back to earth to fulfill his role as our Lord's traitor.

While this may be so, the Scriptures do not exactly say so, thus we merely point out what the Scriptures *do* reveal as to this matter.

Note, the coming "man of sin," the "son of perdition," will exalt himself above "*all that is called God, or that is worshipped,*" permitting no homage to any god or man, but only to himself, even sitting in the holy place of the (rebuilt) temple in Jerusalem, pretending to be God Himself in the flesh ([II Thes. 2:4](#); cf. [Matt. 24:15](#)).

⁵³ I.e., to three and a half years. Thus while the longsuffering of God has lingered for more than 1900 years, His judgment will be swiftly dispatched.

⁵⁴ Lit., "one of you is *diabolos*," the devil. Judas was not a *demon*.

Paul had told the Thessalonians about this when he was with them (Ver. 5), hence the words "yourselves know perfectly" in I Thes. 5:2.

HOW IS THE MANIFESTATION OF ANTICHRIST BEING RESTRAINED?

The Thessalonian believers also understood, says Paul, what the restraining force was that hindered Antichrist from being revealed until "his time" (Ver. 6).

"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let⁵⁵ until he be taken out of the way" (Ver. 7).

The "mystery of iniquity"⁵⁶ stands over against the "mystery of godliness",,, referred to in I Tim. 3:16.

How did we believers come to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ? This was accomplished, not in some dramatic, outward way, but by the quiet working of the Holy Spirit, as we received the Word as the truth of God.

But most people are not aware that Satan works in the same way, only from sinister motives. He is called in Eph. 2:2, "the spirit that now *worketh in* the children of disobedience."

And as "the mystery of godliness" quietly does its work in the saints, so "the mystery of iniquity [or lawlessness] *doth already work*" in the children of disobedience, behind the scenes, but very effectively, for the Prince of Lawlessness is the driving force that carries it forward.

Satan has not yet been revealed in Antichrist, however. For the present he is permitted to scheme, and influence men behind the scenes, but is restrained from promoting lawlessness unchecked.

What is it that restrains the Antichrist from being revealed and hinders this wicked world from "going the limit" in sin?

Some say it is Satan, who is holding on to his place in the heavenlies "until he be taken out of the way" ([Rev. 12:9](#)), but it is hard to imagine Satan, even in and by his personal absence from this earth, *restraining evil*.

Others believe that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit. This solution would be acceptable were it not for the fact that the Holy Spirit will *continue* working on earth during the Tribulation, helping the believing remnant to remain faithful to the end.

⁵⁵ Old English for *restrain*.

⁵⁶ Lit., *lawlessness*, TR.

The author holds that it is the Spirit *in the Church, the Body of Christ* that is referred to, or we might say, the influence of the Spirit through the Church for, remember, it is not the police forces of this world, or its armies, that restrain the evil. It is the true Church, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. When the Church is "taken out of the way," the Spirit's ministry through its members will no longer function on earth to restrain lawlessness or the manifestation of Antichrist. This we believe is the only consistent solution to the identity of the Restrainer and is another strong proof that the rapture of the members of Christ's Body will *precede* the manifestation of Antichrist, first as the great leader and then as the great blasphemer.

THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

In Ver. 9 of II Thes. 2 we read that the coming of Antichrist will be "after," or according to, "the working of Satan, *with all power and signs and lying wonders.*" It is important to bear this in mind in view of the fact that "the mystery of iniquity *doth already work,*" though under restraint (Ver. 7).

It should be clearly understood that the Apostle did not say in I Cor. 13:8 that the gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge would be done away *for a while, or until the closing days of the dispensation of grace.* He simply declared that they would be *done away*, i.e., in this new dispensation, and that "faith, hope, and love" would "abide" (Ver. 13). Nor is there the least indication in Paul's epistles that the Pentecostal signs are to be restored toward the close of this dispensation.

But he does declare that *after* the close of the dispensation of grace, the "man of sin" will appear "*with all power and signs and lying wonders*" (II Thes 2:9). This confirms what our Lord said about the Tribulation:

"For there shall arise *false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect*" (Matt. 24:24).

After the Body of Christ has been caught up to be with Him, then, the ministers of Satan, from Antichrist down, will come with "*all power and signs and lying wonders,*" to deceive, if possible, "the very elect."

Since "the mystery [or secret] of iniquity *doth already work,*" then, what does all this teach us about the multiplied miraculous manifestations, or *alleged* manifestations, we are seeing all about us as the days grow darker? What about the modern "gifts" of tongues, healing, prophecy, ESP, witchcraft, spiritism, exorcism, etc. Are these of God -- even the first three? Obviously, in the light of II Thes. 2, they are *not* of God but of Satan.

A wondrous manifestation is to some the end of all argument. So-and-so must be of God or he could not work these miracles! But God's Word tells us differently.

Satan has power. He can work wonders, but he does so to *deceive* men and draw them away from the truth of God's glorious purpose and grace.

Satan is not a grotesque creature with horns, hooves, a tail and a pitchfork. *He* inspired that caricature to draw away attention from himself, for when the Apostle warns of "*false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ*" (II Cor. 11:13), he adds:

"And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an *angel of light*.

"Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as *the ministers of righteousness...*" (Ver. 14, 15).

There you have it. The "Satan" who appears on public billboards would drive men away, but "*an angel of light,*" with "*ministers of righteousness!*" this attracts the unwary, especially when these ministers are not knowingly Satan's ministers, but have themselves been deceived by him.

But, it is asked, could *Satan* heal the sick and do all these wonderful things? The answer is: If it is Satan who *inflicts* sickness and disease (as we know he did in the cases of Paul and Job), why can he not - why *would* he not -- withdraw the illness he has inflicted if it will cause the afflicted to center their interest on the wrong thing, and cause them to walk by sight rather than by faith? If he could give the reader a million dollars to the ruination of his soul, or his spiritual welfare, would he not do it? Why, then, does not the same hold true where healing is concerned?⁵⁷

THE BIG LIE

We have previously called attention to our Lord's words in John 5:43:

"I am come in My Father's name, and ye receive Me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive."

This prediction will be tragically fulfilled at the rise of Antichrist.

Antichrist will not be immediately "consumed" and "destroyed." For some years he will be permitted to deceive the world "*with power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish...*" (II Thes. 2:9,10).

Then it should -- but will not -- dawn on the masses that the working of miraculous signs does not necessarily prove divine authorization! But this will *not* dawn on the masses because it was not their desire to know the truth, but to go on in their own willful way. This is why God will finally give them over to "the big lie."

⁵⁷ The author goes into this subject more comprehensively in his brochure titled, "*Are the Pentecostal Signs Being Restored?*"

Note: the Apostle refers to "them that perish *because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved*" (Ver. 10). Consider thoughtfully those words, "*because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*" He puts the blame squarely on *them*. They were not *deprived* of faith so that they *could not* be saved. They *rejected* "the love of the truth *that they might be saved.*"

And it is "*For this cause*"--because of *their rejection* of the truth and the love behind it, and their *desire for a lie*, that

"... God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

"That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (Vers. 11,12).

Will God tell a lie? Certainly not, but he will give rebellious men up to a lie. Just as he gave the Gentile world up to the sin and darkness and superstition of idolatry millenniums ago ([Rom. 1:24,26,28](#)) so, at the close of the dispensation of grace He will give the world up again by allowing Antichrist to appear with his "big lie."

BRETHREN BELOVED OF THE LORD

"But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth;

"Whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

"Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,

"Comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work."

--II Thes. 2:13-17

Once again, in closing the doctrinal part of this epistle, the Apostle emphasizes the vast difference between the outlook for God's beloved people and for those who have rejected His love and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, the word "salvation" should here again be carefully considered *in its context*. Salvation from what? Ver. 13 is often used to teach election to salvation from sin and its eternal consequences. We have no objection to this, for the

principle is indeed the same. But the word "salvation" has a wide range of meaning in Scripture, and *in the light of its context*, "salvation" here is from the Tribulation, not from the judgment of the Great White Throne.

What is discussed in the context of II Thes. 2:13? What subject has the Apostle been concerned with? The clear answer is: the rapture of God's people to be with Christ and the subsequent manifestation of His wrath upon a Christ-rejecting world. Particularly in Chapters I and 2, the Apostle discusses our Lord's return to earth in judgment *'in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ'* (1:8). Then he writes about Antichrist and how God will give the Godless masses up to his lie, *"that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness"* (2:12).

In the light of the context, then, the "salvation" to which the Apostle refers here is not salvation from eternal judgment, but salvation from *"the day of God's wrath."* Note the connective "But" at Ver 13.

At the Great White Throne *God's justice*, rather than His wrath, will be manifested. A judge must not allow personal feeling or passion to enter into his decision. He must dispense *justice*, in this case, *penal justice*. Thus, while the word "wrath" occurs at least a dozen times in connection with the Tribulation, and *"the wine of the wrath of God"* will then be *"poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation"* (Rev. 14:10), this word is not found in the passage on the Great White Throne. Rather the Judge, there, is found consulting *books and records* and passing sentence accordingly.

It is after discussing God's *wrath* upon this unbelieving world during the Tribulation, that the Apostle expresses his joy that God has chosen to save believers from this holocaust, "through sanctification of the Spirit and *belief of the truth*" (Ver. 13; cf. Ver. 12 and 1:10).

Thus we have here yet another evidence that the rapture of the Church will *precede* the Tribulation, and that the members of Christ's Body will *not* be called upon to endure the latter. And with this the Apostle again proceeds to *encourage* the believing Thessalonians.

In Ver. 14 he declares that the Thessalonian saints were "called" to this position as God's beloved, by *his* gospel, "the gospel of the grace of God." How often, throughout his epistles, he insists upon this and upon the distinctiveness of his apostleship! Moreover, this glad message eventuated for them in *"the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."* Now they, with Paul and the other members of the Body, could *"rejoice in hope of the glory of God"* (Rom. 5:2).

Thus, as he opens Chapter 2 by beseeching them not to be *"shaken in mind or... troubled"* or *"deceived"* (Vers. 2,3), so he closes it with an exhortation to *"stand fast, and hold the traditions"* taught them both orally and by his letters.

We should note here that the word "tradition" (Gr., *paradosis*) simply denotes that which has been *handed down*, and is not necessarily false, certainly not in this case.

The written Word of God was not yet complete, but the truths which Paul had "handed down" to them *were* the Word of God whether oral or written, thus he exhorts them to "stand fast" and to "hold [on to]" these "traditions" as delivered to them. How the Apostle keeps exhorting these believers not to falter in their faith in the Lord's coming for them *before* the Tribulation breaks! This doubtless because of the persecutions they were suffering. But since Paul's word to them is also God's Word to us, we should regard this as an appeal to us today not to be led astray from this precious truth, or to lose it as our "blessed hope."

How beautiful is Ver. 16! Our blessed Lord and our heavenly Father, whose beloved we are, has given us this "everlasting consolation and good hope *through grace*." All this joy and blessing and "good hope," given and received "*through grace*".

Little wonder he closes this doctrinal section of the epistle with the words:

"Now our Lord Jesus Christ *Himself*,⁵⁸ and God, even our *Father*, who *hath* loved us.... Comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work" (Vers. 16, 17).

There is that word "comfort," or "encourage," again! Shall we not heed the exhortation and encourage each other often with "that blessed hope" of our Lord's coming, before the Tribulation, to take us to Himself!

⁵⁸ Cf. I Thes. 4:16.

Chapter IV - II Thessalonians 3:1-18

CLOSING EXHORTATIONS

PAUL'S ONENESS WITH THE SAINTS AT THESSALONICA

"Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:

"And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for all men have not faith.

"But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.

"And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.

"And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."

--1 Thes. 3:1-5

"Finally" the Apostle adds his personal requests, instructions, exhortations and practical applications of what he has been teaching them in this epistle.

His request for prayer in this case is not for courage or strength or anything personal. It is *"that the Word of the Lord may have free course⁵⁹ and be glorified"* (Ver. 1). This, the spread of the gospel, was ever on his heart, for the love of Christ, to him and to all, bore him along like an ocean tide (See [II Cor. 5:14](#)).

It should be observed that he asks their prayers that it might be with him as *it is with them* (Ver. 1). This shows what variations there are in persecution. With the Thessalonian believers there was bitter persecution, indeed, but this only helped to spread the gospel, for in their case it was being everywhere discussed.

In the case of Paul, however, there was a difference, for he adds a request that he might be delivered from *"unreasonable and wicked men"* who *"have not faith"*⁵⁹ (Ver. 2). There were schemes and plots against him.

We get some idea of the kind of persecution Paul endured at Corinth, when we realize that a concerted effort was made by the Jews of the synagogue, to have

⁵⁹ It is true that the technical meaning of the Greek *treko* is "run," but KJV captures the *sense* of the passage better than any other translations we have examined. He asks for prayer that the Word may have *"free course,"* the course, naturally, referring to the *race course*.

⁵⁹ *Subjectively*, who cannot be trusted.

him condemned by the Roman proconsul and cast into prison, so as to restrain his testimony.⁶⁰

His request for prayer that the Word might have free course reminds us of two of his other requests for prayer: In [Eph. 6:19,20](#), that he might be given "utterance" and "boldness," and in [Col. 4:3](#), that God would open to him "a *door* or utterance," to proclaim the mystery, for which he had been imprisoned. His one deep passion was to make known the glorious message which he had received by revelation from the Lord.

But his request for prayer that he might be delivered from "unreasonable and wicked men" is immediately followed by the assurance to them that "*the Lord is faithful*" and that He will make them ever more mature as believers and will *keep them from evil* (Vers. 2,3). How their persecutions were wrapped up with his own! How concerned he was for *them* as persecution swirled about *him*. *His* afflictions turned his heart the more to *them*. But who could better encourage them as to the outcome than he? His prayer for deliverance from "unreasonable and wicked men" and his assurance that the "faithful" Lord will keep His own from evil, reminds us of one of his very last expressions of such confidence, while awaiting execution at Rome:

"And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (II Tim. 4:18).

As we proceed with Verses 4,5 of II Thes. 3, it is touching again to read those words, "We have confidence *in the Lord* -- *touching you*, that ye both *do* and *will do* the things which we command you." Note, he does not say, "We have confidence *in you*." They are too harassed now for him to try to bolster up their determination. Rather he says, "We have confidence *in the Lord touching you*." This would be of greater encouragement to them than if he expressed confidence in their courage and manliness for, remember, one ounce of confidence in God is worth more than many pounds of self-confidence. And note, he writes with the authority of an Apostle, expressing his confidence that they are doing and will continue to do his *commands* (Ver. 4).

And then, with the passion that had possessed him ever since his Damascus Road conversion, he expresses further confidence that the Lord will direct their hearts "*into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ*" (Ver. 5).

It is highly significant that in all of Paul's epistles he *never once* mentions his deep love for God or for the Lord Jesus Christ. Rather he consistently extols *God's love for him*.

⁶⁰ It is interesting to notice however, that Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue when Paul departed to the Gentiles, and Sosthenes, the *next* chief ruler, who was so soundly beaten before Gallio's court, *both* evidently came to trust in Christ (See Acts 18:8,17; I Cor. 1:1).

Without in any way disparaging the twelve apostles or their ministry for Christ, it is still a fact that, compared to the twelve Paul seems like a blazing torch next to twelve candles, and this is not strange, for to him, the chief of sinners, was given the greatest revelation of the love of Christ.

It was an appreciation of this love that set and kept him on fire for his Lord. This alone explains the utter abandon with which he labored and suffered for Christ. Often he was "pressed out of measure, above strength," and would have given up, but he *could not, for the love of Christ* bore him along as an ocean tide.⁶¹ This infinite love to sinners, demonstrated in the grace that had saved even him, continually overwhelmed him--and was to him a constant source of strength.

And this is what he desired for the Thessalonian saints -- that their hearts might be directed, not "to love God," but "*into the love of God.*" And as they did thus bask in *His* love, could there be any question that they would love Him the more?

And now, in closing this section, once more the Apostle encourages them, despite, yea in view of, all their persecutions, to continue as they had begun. They had "turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and *to wait for His Son from heaven*" (I Thes. 1:9), and now he prays that the Lord will direct their hearts "into the love of God, and into *the patient waiting for Christ*"⁶² (II Thes. 3:5), the article indicating that *patient* waiting is what should be expected of them in view of God's grace and longsuffering toward sinful men.

IRRESPONSIBILITY REBUKED

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

"For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us; for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you;

"Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:

"Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow us.

"For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

⁶¹ This is the sense of the word "constrains" in II Cor. 5:14.

⁶² How beautifully, in the light of all the preceding context, the KJV translators captured the *sense* of this phrase, as compared with, say, the rendering of the *New American Standard Bible*, with its "steadfastness of Christ"!

"For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.

"Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.

"But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.

"And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.

"Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

-- II Thes. 3:6-15

In the above passage we have the only instance in either of the Thessalonian epistles of any cause for reproof.

The disorderly conduct referred to, however, was not the same as the "disorderly conduct" charges found on so many police blotters in our day. It was rather *irresponsibility*. The Greek word for *disorder* denotes simply a lack of order. To the Colossians he could write:

"For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ" (Col. 2:5).

But to the *disorderly* Corinthians he wrote, in reproof,

"God is not the author of confusion" (I Cor. 14:33).

Now disorder and confusion at Thessalonica had resulted, in some cases, from a few among them who, waiting for the Lord's coming, gave up their daily employment and went visiting from house to house, doubtless to discuss their "blessed hope." Naturally some, probably many or most,⁶³ of those whom they visited invited them to enjoy their meals with them. All this, however, made for disorder and, in-deed, ill feeling. Thus the Apostle's words of reproof in the passage we are considering.

In Vers. 6,7 he contrasts their disorderly walk with the tradition he had handed down to them and with his own conduct.

"We behaved not ourselves disorderly among you," he says,

⁶³ It was considered a serious breach of hospitality in those days not to invite a visitor to enjoy one's food and even lodging.

"Neither did we eat any man's bread for naught; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:

"Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow us" (Vers. 7-9).

As an Apostle of Christ Paul surely had the "power," or right, to expect financial remuneration as he labored so faithfully among believers in city after city. Yet we find him working with his own hands, and often *working hard* (Ver. 8), as a tentmaker, that he might not be chargeable to any of them; that they might never be able to say, "Paul made a good thing of us."

It is a sad fact that too many evangelists and travelling preachers today dine and live well at their hosts' expense, but show little sensitiveness or gratitude over such expense. Paul avoided this assiduously, eating no man's bread for nought, not because his position as an Apostle did not give him this right, but to make himself *an example to them*. This reveals not only consideration on Paul's part, but also a generous heart. He would always rather give than receive.

Thus, when under pressure or in bonds, beloved friends like the Philippians sent gifts to sustain and encourage him, these gifts were the more precious, like "an odor of a sweet smell" (Phil. 4:13-18). Oh, that more men of God would set such an example to the saints to whom they minister!⁶⁴

Paul had not been able to remain long with the Thessalonians, however, and now there was an additional temptation on their part, to quit work and go about visiting others (Ver. 11): the Lord might come at any moment!

Ah, but it would be a mistake to use this as a justification for "disorderly conduct," for the Lord might also, in grace, linger for a time. Thus the Apostle reminds them:

"... this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (Ver. 10).

Thus the Apostle declares that the delinquent ones should be disciplined. Don't *invite* such a person to *your* home, he says; rather "withdraw yourselves" from such (Ver. 6). It is generous indeed of you to want to invite him, but if you do you will encourage him to continue "loafing" and "sponging" on others. Rather reserve your generosity for unfortunate people who are truly in need, or at least for Christian friends who themselves "walk orderly." And regarding the *disorderly*, the Apostle says:

⁶⁴ Often through life have we observed that congregations soon reflect the attitudes and conduct of their pastors. Let the pastor be generous and invariably the congregation will also come to be so--and vice versa.

"Now them that are such we *command* and *exhort* by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat *their own bread*" (Ver. 12).

But now a word of caution is due the congregation as a whole. The discipline which was not only justified, but necessary where indolents and busybodies were concerned, should not produce a hard, ungenerous attitude in faithful believers. Paul suggests this danger when he says,

"But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing" (Ver. 13).

There is always so much real need about us that God would have us softhearted and open-handed with the funds He has entrusted to us. But with respect to those who are rebellious and would live on the generosity of others, the instructions are plain:

"And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, *note that man*, and have no company with him that he may be ashamed.

"Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (Vers. 14,15).

Disorderliness is *irresponsibility*, hence the importance of orderly thinking and conduct in the Christian life. It is evident that Paul was highly pleased with the order among the Colossian believers and deeply concerned over the *lack* of order among the Corinthians. It was, then, consistent of the Apostle to instruct the beloved Thessalonian saints to reject the company of those who persisted in their disorderly ways, so that they might be ashamed. It does make a difference -- a great difference -- what company we keep.

"Yet [and here he again cautions against a cold, hard attitude] *count him not as an enemy*, but *admonish* [reprove] him as a brother" (Ver. 15).

CLOSING SALUTATION

"Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all.

"The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

--II Thes. 3:16-18

At least six times in Paul's epistles we find the phrase "*the God of peace*," but here it is "*the Lord* [Gr., *Kurios*] *of peace*," the One who is over all. He is on the

throne; He controls the tempest-and He can give you peace "always by all means" despite your persecutions and sufferings.

This is indeed a beautiful benediction, and made the more so as we consider the addition of the word "*Himself*" to the above phrase. "*Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace...*"

In the Thessalonian epistles the word "*Himself*" is used four times in this connection, and it always gives the impression of God's, or Christ's, *personal* concern for His saints: "Now *God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ*, direct our way unto you" (I Thes. 3:11); "*The Lord Himself*" will come for you (I Thes. 4:16); "*Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, who hath loved us... comfort your hearts...*" (II Thes. 2:16,17); and here, "*the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always, by all means.. .*" (II Thes. 3:16). This enhances the phrase that follows: "*the Lord be with you all,*" and would serve to make His presence with them all the more real.

In every one of Paul's epistles, except that to the Hebrews, he signs his name personally⁶⁵ (Ver. 17), always at the opening and thrice also at the close (I Cor., Col., and II Thes.). He learned to do this early in his writing career, for it was at Thessalonica that someone had forged his name to a letter, or had in *some* way made it appear that he had written it.

And now we come to the very closing words of this epistle so filled with grace and comfort, especially the solemn, precious comfort of our Lord's coming to snatch His own away from this world before He returns to visit His fierce judgment upon it:

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen"

⁶⁵ For a very special reason; God would have him known preeminently as "*the apostle of the Gentiles.*"

APPENDIX

The author is indebted to *Kregel Publications* for permission to include in this volume the following excerpts from Pp. 71-81 of *Forgotten Truths*, by Sir Robert Anderson. We present them as further confirmation -- eloquent confirmation -- of our arguments for the pre-tribulation Rapture of the members of the Body of Christ:

. . . the message received by the disciples on the Mount of the Ascension does not relate to the same Coming as the Apostle's words to the Thessalonians and the Corinthians. But the Coming of the Lord as *Savior* is now confounded with "the day of the Lord"--the day of wrath. In fact the error which the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians was designed to correct is now in the creed of Christendom!

Are we to believe that the Gentile converts were taught to live in expectation of the Coming, although, *ex hypothesi*, before that hope could be realized the people of God were doomed to pass through a time of horror unparalleled in all the ages? and yet no Epistle except that to the Thessalonians contained a warning word about that awful time. And the Apostle's words to them, if intended as a warning, could scarcely have been more deceptive. For after speaking of the Coming as a present hope with which to comfort one another, he went on to speak of the day of the Lord as pertaining to the "times and seasons" of Israel's national history. To the world that day would come as a day of wrath, for, "when *they* shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon *them*." But in contrast with this the Apostle adds, "God has not appointed *us* to wrath, but to obtain deliverance by our Lord Jesus Christ." What meaning could the Thessalonians put upon these words, save that the appointed deliverance was by the Coming of the Lord? And to make this still more clear he again exhorts them to comfort one another with his words.

I will offer no conjectures as to what the course of events would have been if the nation had accepted the Divine amnesty proclaimed at Pentecost. Certain it is, however, that none of the words of Christ will fail of their ultimate fulfillment on account of Israel's rejection of the proffered mercy. But so long as Israel's national position is in abeyance, the stream of fulfillment is tided back; or to change the figure, the hands upon the dial of prophetic time are motionless. Without this clew to guide us in our study of them, the Scriptures appear to be full of confusion, if not of error.

"The times and seasons" rest with Him to whom a thousand years are as one day. And when in Matthew xxiv, for example, the Lord addressed His hearers as though they themselves would pass through the Great Tribulation, we recognize that this would have proved literally true if the Jews had accepted Him as their Messiah. But with Romans xi before us, we recognize also that, when Israel was cast aside the clock of prophetic time was stopped, to be set in motion once again

at the close of this intercalary "Christian dispensation." And then the Lord's prophetic words shall be fulfilled as though this age of ours had never intervened.

And now, if we will but rise above the mists of controversy, and arguments based on isolated texts, and take note of the prominent landmarks of prophetic interpretation, and the distinctive truths of the Christian revelation, we shall find abundant proof that the fulfillment of Matthew xxiv belongs to a future age, and to an economy essentially different from our own.

But the words [our Lord] spoke on Olivet were the words of God, and no dispensational change affects their eternal truth. And from them we learn that, when the time of their fulfillment comes, the Covenant people will have regained their normal *status* as the people of God, and that a believing community of Israelites will be living in their own land and their own "city," with a restored sanctuary accredited as "the Temple of God." Not "Jewish Christians" in the present-day sense,⁶⁶ but Jews whose faith will be akin to that of the Lord's disciples during His earthly ministry. And the very words which these disciples heard from the Master's lips will reach His disciples in that future age, just as they reach us today, by means of the printed page on which they are recorded.

Once we shake free from the influence of traditional exegesis, we can see with noontide clearness that the entire scene, and all the circumstances, portrayed by the Lord's teaching in the 24th chapter of Matthew, pertain to the future age of a restored Israel. And therefore, prior to their fulfillment this "Christian dispensation" must have been brought to end....

.... We are taught to look for Him, and that a crowning blessing will be theirs "who are alive and remain unto the Coming of the Lord." Are we then to believe that this involves our passing through such times and scenes of terror as would make us "praise the dead that are already dead more than the living that are yet alive"! In his Patmos vision of that awful time the Seer hears a voice from heaven proclaiming, "Blessed are the *dead*."⁶⁷ And if this Tribulation theory were true, should we not, in the spirit of those words, cry to God with earnest importunity to be allowed to die, rather than to await the Coming of the Lord?

.... the early saints were led to expect the Lord's return Never a week went by, never a Lord's day [sic.] passed, without their hearing those charter words, "Until He come." And who among them could fail to ask their meaning! Whatever else of Christian truth they lacked, this at least they knew from the day they first

⁶⁶ For the Lord's coming for His heavenly people having already taken place, "the Christian Church" will have reached the full development of its apostasy, and will then be awaiting its fearful doom. See Dean Alford's words on P. 97, *post*.

⁶⁷ Rev. xiv. 13

took part in the sacred rite [sic.] -- the Lord who died for them would return again, and they were to live looking for His Coming.