

The Rapture, the Appearing and the Eternal State

... together with the relationships of the several events,

... including the world to come.

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It is of exceeding importance as the end of the present period is approaching that we should have scriptural thoughts concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Unhappily a great deal of controversy has arisen upon the subject, and, as a consequence, simple people have been either perplexed or beguiled. The slightest acquaintance with the course of public teaching amongst evangelical Christians, during the last fifty or sixty years, reveals the fact that the pendulum of opinion has been swinging between the two parts of the same subject, namely, the rapture of the saints before the appearing of Christ, and the public manifestation of Christ in glory when He comes to establish His sway over the earth. On the one side, the rapture has so engrossed the attention that the appearing of Christ has almost been ignored; and on the other side, the latter has been so prominent that the former blessed truth has by many been even denied. As an example of this, it may be mentioned that one of the most ardent advocates of the appearing of the Lord Jesus in glory, who now refuses the rapture, was once equally zealous in maintaining that the immediate hope of the believer is the expectation of Christ to gather up His people to meet Him in the air, according to 1 Thessalonians 4. And this teacher and writer is only one of a large number who hold the same view, namely, that all the prophetic judgments of the Book of Revelation have been fulfilled, and, consequently, that the only thing left to be waited for is the coming out of heaven of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Were this all, there would not be much difficulty, with an open Bible, for those who understand the difference between Israel and the church to decide between these rival schools of

teaching. But there is another question to be met, and amongst those who fully believe that all believers will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (call it the secret rapture or any other term that may better express the fact), before the judgments recorded in the Book of Revelation are poured out, and hence anterior to the time when Christ will appear the second time without sin unto salvation. Agreeing in this, the question has yet arisen as to which of these two aspects of the coming of Christ the believer should be mainly occupied.

Before we attempt to answer this question, let it be frankly admitted that amongst these Christians the rapture of the saints — the secret rapture, if the phrase be preferred — assumed in years past the chief importance both in teaching and conversation. This, it was contended, is the hope of the church, and accordingly the appearing of Christ with His people fell relatively into a place of less importance. Even then, however, there were some who seized and presented the two events in their proper relationship and proportions, as their writings abundantly testify. Still, it cannot be denied that the rapture of believers obtained the predominant place, nor that the expectation of the Lord at any moment exercised a most powerful effect upon the hearts and lives of many of His people. So much is gladly and fully conceded.

As time, however, went on, increasing intelligence in the ways of God in respect of the glory of Christ in the scene of His rejection was gained, and the horizon of the believer was widened so as to include not only the presentation of His bride to Himself, but also the glories of Christ in His kingdom, together with His glory as the Son of man, to whom, in this character, all things are to be put under His feet. (Heb. 2.) Eventually the horizon was still further widened on the basis of Ephesians 1: 10, where we read that in the dispensation of the fulness of times all things whether in heaven or in earth will be gathered together in one ("headed up") in Christ. This consummation of the ways of God has been happily termed the universe of bliss, of which Christ is the centre and the sun, according to the language of the well-known hymn:-

"Of the vast universe of bliss,
The centre Thou and sun;
Th' eternal theme of praise is this,
To heaven's beloved One:
Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou,
That every knee to Thee should bow."

That even this wondrous scene of blessedness is not final all will gladly admit. The eternal state is to follow, but concerning this we have only a few indications. These are very pregnant, as we may consider further on, but now we confine ourselves to this outline of the various phases of the subject which have appeared at one time or another amongst the people of God. We are constrained to add one remark. It appears to us of immense significance that the vision of the Christian, while the elements of the eternal state are to be plainly gathered from scripture, is

directed to and filled with, if not limited to, the glories of Christ, the One he knows as his Saviour, Redeemer, Lord and Head.

(1) THE IMMEDIATE PROSPECT OF THE CHRISTIAN.

Let us now proceed to inquire what the scriptures teach on the subject we have described. The first object with us should be to ascertain what is the immediate prospect of the Christian. It must not be forgotten, if we would be practical, that there is, as the first thing "before us, the possibility of death. Generation after generation of believers have waited for the coming of the Lord, even as Paul said, "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord;" but their hopes have not been fulfilled. As a poet, dwelling upon this subject, has written: —

"Saint after saint on earth
Has lived and loved and died;
And, as they left us one by one,
We laid them side by side.
We laid them down to sleep,
But not in hope forlorn;
We laid them but to ripen there,
Till the last glorious morn.
Come, then, Lord Jesus, come!"

We therefore, like these, may die before the coming of the Lord; but if so, as the apostle says, To depart and be with Christ is far better. But while there is this possibility, death is never held out in the New Testament scriptures as the Christian's immediate prospect. On the contrary, whether in the gospels or the epistles, the coming of Christ is always presented as the first thing to be expected. Thus, for example, in Matthew the virgins (Matt. 25) who fall asleep are in the parable the same who are awakened by the cry "Behold, the bridegroom." In Mark and Luke alike the exhortation to watch is given on the ground that the disciples did not know the day nor the hour of their Lord's return. (See Mark 13: 32-37; Luke 12: 35-40, etc.) Even in John the Lord said to His disciples, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14: 3.) So also in the epistles, in addition to the passage before adduced, we find the apostle saying, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (1 Cor. 15: 51, 52.) It is not indeed going too far to say that waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is the characteristic of all believers. (See 1 Cor. 1: 7; 1 Thess. 1: 9, 10, etc.)

It is incontestable therefore that the coming of Christ is the hope of the Christian, and even that all professors, equally with genuine believers, are *on the ground* of the expectation of the Lord's return, for the description of all the ten virgins alike is that they went forth to meet the Bridegroom. Another thing has yet to be observed. It is not a little remarkable that while the immediate prospect of the believer is, as we have shown, the coming of Christ, not a word is given to distinguish for us between the Lord's return to claim the church as His bride, and His manifestation with His people in glory. Indeed with one, or at the utmost two exceptions all the passages which speak of the subject refer to the appearing of the Lord. It is always so when the servant or the believer is regarded as under responsibility to his absent Lord. Thus Paul exhorts Timothy to keep the "commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 6: 14), and in Titus we read, Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing ("the appearing of the glory") of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. (Titus 2: 13.) John also says, We know that, when He shall appear ("be manifested"), we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. It may sound strange in some ears, but it is nevertheless the fact, that the rapture of the saints, although implied or involved in several places, is only once directly unfolded in the scriptures.

(2) THE RELATION OF THE RAPTURE TO THE APPEARING OF CHRIST.

We pass on now to consider the relation of the rapture to the appearing, and this we shall find fully set forth in 1 Thessalonians 4, and to this chapter we must ask the reader's careful attention. The apostle begins by saying, "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." (1 Thess. 4: 13, 14.) There had evidently been a misapprehension on the part of the Thessalonians concerning those of their number who had died before the Lord's return; they feared that these had lost the blessedness of association with Christ in the glory of the kingdom, and they sorrowed for them almost as for those who had no hope. So far they had received no definite instruction upon this point, but now to meet the need which had arisen the apostle communicated to them what he had specially received from the Lord for the occasion.

Having thus affirmed that God would bring back with Christ, when He returns to establish His kingdom in glory, "them also which sleep in Jesus," he proceeds to explain how this will be accomplished: "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 [anticipate — have any advantage over] 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 he Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (Vers. 15-18.) Thereupon the apostle proceeds to speak of the times and seasons, and of the day of the Lord, which he says should not overtake the saints as a thief, forasmuch as they were children of the light, and the children of the day. (1 Thess. 5.)

The secret has thus been revealed, and we now know that before the manifestation in glory the dead in Christ will be raised, and the living saints will be changed, and that together they will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Two things are thus made certain:

(1) *That the immediate prospect of the believer is the rapture, and that there is nothing as far as is revealed, to hinder this taking place at any moment; and*

(2) *That the rapture, as it is, and especially as a motive for a holy walk and conversation, is not the final prospect, but is the means to an end, the end being the revelation of the saints in glory at the appearing of Christ.*

(See Col. 3: 4)

Bearing this in mind we shall be the better able to understand why it is that the appearing of our Lord is so constantly presented in scripture as the believer's goal. We do not forget the contention that the rapture is the hope of the church, and that the appearing of Christ is the prospect of the individual believer in his responsible path as a Christian. It will suffice to say at present in reply, that it has already been shown that, in the only place in which the rapture is described in detail, it is given as a means to an end. We now propose to run rapidly through the epistles to learn what they teach on the subject. We omit the gospels, because in them, the church not having been yet formed, the return of the Lord would be naturally connected with the kingdom. With one *possible* exception in John's gospel, there is no indication of the rapture in the four evangelists.

We begin, then, with the Epistle to the Romans. As early as Romans 5 we read, "and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." No one, we suppose, would doubt for a moment that the reference is to the display of God's glory when Christ returns. If there should be any doubt, a passage or two from Romans 8 will remove it. The apostle says, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Ver. 18.) Admittedly, the last two words by no means represent the force of the original. We do not indeed read anywhere of glory to be revealed in us, but the scripture is full of teaching concerning the glory in which we shall be displayed. (See John 17: 22, 23; 2 Thess. 1: 10, etc.) And it is of this glory, glory to be revealed to us (see New Translation), of which Paul speaks. So likewise in verse 21, where we read of the liberty of the glory, as it should be translated, of the children of God. Coming next to 1 Corinthians, in the very first chapter we find the expression "waiting for the coming" (the "revelation" it really is) "of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ver. 7.) It is true that in chapter 15 we have the resurrection of believers at the coming of Christ (ver. 23), and that this precedes, as we have already seen, the manifestation of Christ in glory; but the subject of the chapter is simply the resurrection of the body, and, consequently, even though the apostle speaks of the living being changed, as well as the dead being raised (ver. 52), he says nothing of our being caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. In the second epistle the subject of the Lord's coming is not mentioned, though implied in 2 Cor. 4: 14, and 2 Cor. 5: 2, nor in Galatians. Passing on, then, to Ephesians, what do we find? It is often said that we could not have the Lord's coming in this epistle because the saints are seen sitting in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. This is undoubtedly true, but we see something in a certain way still more wonderful. Just because the church is viewed as seated with Christ in the heavenlies, the prospect

is opened out of the blessing and the glory of the world to come. Thus at the end of Ephesians 1 we read of the working of God's "mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. 1: 19-23.) In verse 10 also, it speaks of the same period as the fulness of times, when all things, whether in heaven or on earth, will be "headed up" in Christ.

Concerning this, we give the words of another: "It will be a grand spectacle, as the result of the ways of God, to see all things united in perfect peace and union under the authority of man, of the last Adam, the Son of God; ourselves associated with Him in the same glory with Himself, His companions in the heavenly glory, as the objects of the eternal counsels of God. . . . The eternal state, in which God is all in all, is again another thing. The administration of the fulness of times is the result of the ways of God in government; the eternal state, that of the perfection of His nature. We, even in the government, are brought in according to His nature as sons. Wonderful privilege!"

The next epistle is that of Philippians, and at the very outset the apostle prays that the saint's in that city might "be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ," and this could only be the day introduced by His appearing. Until then, as Paul elsewhere speaks, it is man's day. Coming to the third chapter a remarkable thing presents itself. "Our conversation," the apostle writes, "is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, 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." (Vers. 20, 21.) Now, as we know, the transformation of the bodies of living believers will take place in connection with the coming of Christ for His people, and yet so fully is the world to come before the mind of the apostle that he tells us that the power which will then change our bodies into the likeness of the glorified body of Christ is the same power as that which will subdue all things to Himself in the day of His glory. This is very striking indeed! Colossians succeeds Philippians and bears the same testimony. "Ye are dead," Paul writes to the saints, "and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." (Col. 3: 3, 4.) We will not dwell at this time upon the momentous teaching of this scripture, we only call attention to the fact that the goal before the mind of the apostle here is the display of the saints in glory together with Christ. The life, the true life, of the believer is now a hidden one, because Christ, who is our life, is hidden in God; but when He comes forth in manifested glory, His people will all be manifested in the glory which He has bestowed upon them.

The two epistles to the Thessalonians are full of the subject under consideration. 1 Thessalonians 4 has already come before us, and it was pointed out that while the rapture of the saints is explained authoritatively in detail, it is brought in to show how those who have fallen asleep in Christ will be brought back with Christ at His appearing, and hence that the rapture is the means to an end. In chapter 1 to wait for God's Son "out" from the heavens, if not simply characteristic, is certainly to await the appearing, connected as it is with Jesus, our Deliverer from the coming wrath. (1 Thess. 1: 10.) So also 1 Thess. 2: 19, and in 1 Thess. 3: 13, it explicitly speaks of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. In chapter 4 whether

in the first verses or in verse 23, whatever the different aspects presented, the same event is in view. As to the second epistle, there could not possibly be any difference of judgment, for it speaks in 1 Thess. 1 of the Lord Jesus being revealed from heaven with His mighty angels — when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe; and in chapter 2 of His consuming that wicked one, the Antichrist, with the spirit of His mouth, and destroying him with the brightness of His coming. (2 Thess. 2: 6-8.)

The pastoral epistles unite in the same testimony. In 1 Timothy 6 the apostle says: "I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; that thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: which in his times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords," etc. (Vers. 13-15.) Remark upon such a clear statement is needless, and we add another passage from the second epistle equally plain: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Tim. 4: 8.) Titus is no less distinct, for therein we read: "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing ["appearing of the glory"] of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." (Titus 2: 13.) And let it be observed that there is no foundation for the traditional teaching which refers "the blessed hope" to the rapture, for the blessed hope, according to the structure of the sentence, is the appearing. It is one event in the apostle's mind, and that one event, the appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, is the blessed hope to which Paul directs the eye and heart of Titus as the goal in his responsible path of service, for the scene of labour will be the scene of displayed recompense at the return of the Lord. (See Luke 19: 11-27.)

Omitting Philemon, as being a personal letter there is no mention of the subject, we come to Hebrews, in which all would admit there is no trace, and from the character of the epistle could not be, of the rapture of the saints. One citation will therefore suffice to indicate the goal which the Spirit of God here would keep before the hearts of the Hebrew Christians: "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." (Heb. 9: 28.) And who could doubt that James in like manner speaks of the appearing, especially as his epistle is addressed to the twelve tribes, when he writes: "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh"? The evidence of Peter's epistles is simply overwhelming to the same end. (See 1 Peter 1: 7-13; 1 Peter 4: 5-13; 1 Peter 5: 4; 2 Peter 1-16; 2 Peter 3: 8-14.) The epistles of John follow. The first reference to the coming of Christ is found in chapter 2: "And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." (1 John 2: 28.) In chapter 3 there is another conclusive statement: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear [is not yet manifested] what we shall "be: but we know that, when he shall appear [be manifested], we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3: 2.) The second and third epistles, being, like Philemon, individual communications, are silent upon the subject, but the passages quoted from the first epistle make it abundantly plain that the manifestation of Christ was the object before the soul of John, and the object which he was directed to place before the minds of those to whom he was writing. Jude only remains of the epistles proper, and it is evident at a glance that he falls into line with the other sacred writers. He thus says, citing Enoch: "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam,

prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all," etc. (Jude 14, 15.)

A brief reference now to the Book of Revelation must close this rapid review. Let it, however, be, first of all, distinctly stated that, if we have no direct teaching in this book concerning the saints being caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, the fact is both alluded to and implied. It is, for example, alluded to in Revelation 3: 10, for the way in which the Lord will keep His saints "out of" "the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth," is by coming to receive them unto Himself, by taking them out of the scene upon which the judgments connected with the seals, the trumpets, and the vials, will fall. And hence the following words, "Behold, I come quickly" (Rev. 3: 11), may be a promise with this end in view. It is implied, moreover, in the connection between chapters 3 and 4. If "the things which are" of Revelation 1: 19 embrace the whole church period, as they evidently do, the church is seen on earth in the place of God's candlestick until the close of chapter 3. But in Revelation 4 the twenty-four elders are seen in heaven, and these elders, it could easily be demonstrated, certainly represent all Christians as well as the believers of former dispensations. This being so, the church must have been rapt away from this scene before the opening of chapter 4. So also in Revelation 12 it may well be that the church is included in the Man Child who was caught up unto God and to His throne. Indeed it is of all-importance to insist upon the fact that the rapture of the saints will precede the appearing of Christ in glory. The question raised is simply whether our horizon is to be bounded by this event.

But to return: apart from the allusion in chapter 3, and the implication of the rapture in the places cited, all the references in Revelation are to the public manifestation of Christ. Even in the promises to the overcomer in Thyatira and Laodicea, not to speak of that to the overcomer in Philadelphia, it is association with Christ in the glory of the kingdom which is held forth as the blessed encouragement. And in the well-known scripture in the last chapter (Rev. 22: 16) the Lord presents Himself as the Root and the Offspring of David, His title to the kingdom, before His character as the bright and morning Star.

What then are the conclusions to be drawn from this rapid consideration of the testimony of Scripture? That there may be no misapprehension it must again be stated that the rapture of the saints is the first thing to be expected, and hence that it cannot be lost sight of or ignored. But it is equally certain, as has been shown, that the rapture, according to the evidence adduced from the epistles and the Book of Revelation, is but the pathway to the display of the glory of Christ, and of His people associated with Him in the glories of that day. There will be the private presentation of His bride by Christ to Himself, as a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, holy and without blemish, and no stranger will intermeddle in the peculiar joy of that day. And yet, special and intimate as all this blessedness will be, it is only the prelude to the public celebration of the marriage of the Lamb and of His coming out of heaven. (See Rev. 19; Rev. 21: 9-11, *et seq.*) The going in is therefore in order to the coining out, and the purpose of God in respect of His beloved Son will not be accomplished until all things are put under His feet. There is a reason for this. It was here in this scene that Christ was rejected and crucified. If therefore He did not come back and reign until all enemies are subdued under Him, Satan would have gotten the victory as far as this world is concerned. Even the semblance of this could not be tolerated, for inasmuch as Christ has tasted death for everything, He will therefore, according to

the purpose of God, take possession of everything, and every knee will bow to Him, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2.) It is on this account that Christ will come out in glory with His redeemed of every age and clime and flood the whole earth, indeed the whole universe, with the glory of God. God has this object before Him, and is ever working on to this end; and consequently every one who enters into His mind and thoughts concerning His beloved Son will delight in the contemplation of the day of Christ, even as Abraham did, His exaltation in the scene of His rejection. Instructed by the word, he will not forget the imminency of the rapture, but, as he lives in the daily expectation of the coming of Christ, he will remember that this is the preparation for, and the prelude to, the return of Christ, together with His people, to subdue all things unto Himself.

(3) THE RELATION OF THE APPEARING TO THE WORLD TO COME.

Having thus explained the relation of the rapture to the appearing, it may simplify the subject if a few words are added to show the relation of the Appearing of Christ to the world to come, or the millennium. From what has been already said, it would be gathered that just as the rapture is in order to the appearing, so the appearing is in order to the establishment of the world to come. To faith it already exists, for the apostle distinctly says, But ye *are come* unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, etc.; and he proceeds to enumerate all the features which will distinguish that age. And how blessed it is to turn aside from all the evil, darkness and confusion which mark the present moment to the light, order and blessing which will characterise the sway of Christ. If one reflection might be permitted, it would be that it is living in the light of this world which delivers from the power of present things, simply because it keeps the eye on Christ. Thus Peter speaks with all confidence, as he recalled the scene he had witnessed in the mount of transfiguration, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty." (2 Peter 1: 16.) In like manner when faith apprehends the glory of Christ in the world to come, all the glitter and brightness of this world will fade away into darkness and be estimated at their proper value. As another has written, "One ray of the glory of Christ will soon wither up all the defiled glory of this world like an autumn leaf."

The appearing then of Christ will be in order to establish His kingdom and the world to come. We have distinguished between the kingdom and the world to come to explain the difference. When we speak of the reign of Christ, He is presented to our minds as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. In truth He is God's King whom God has set upon His holy hill of Zion. (Ps. 2.) It is in this character that He will reign over His people Israel, and thence extend His dominion to the uttermost bounds of the earth, so that the kingdom or nation which will not serve Him will utterly perish. The prophets are full of this aspect of the glorious kingdom of the Messiah.

But when we speak of the world to come, it is in the character of Son of man that Christ is presented. It is so in Psalm 8. "What is man," cries the psalmist, "that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works

of thy hands: *thou hast put all things under his feet.*" (Vers. 4-6.) Turning now to Hebrews 2, we find that the apostle says explicitly that this scripture applies to Christ. He begins by saying, "Unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak;" and then he goes on to cite this very scripture, and shows that it is to find its fulfilment in Christ. In doing so he reveals two additional particulars: that Jesus was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, and that He, being now crowned with glory in His pathway to the accomplishment of the purpose of God, tasted death for everything. Three things are thus made clear: first, that the death of Christ, and in the aspect here presented, "for everything," is the foundation of the subjection to Him of the world to come; secondly, that His being crowned with glory and honour at the right hand of God is in virtue of His death; and, thirdly, that His present exaltation and glory are the pledge of His coming universal dominion. But we desire to lay great stress upon the fact that all things will be put under Him as Son of man. There is a divine reason for this. Christ habitually used the term Son of man in view of His rejection, sufferings and death; and hence it is that God will honour Him in this title in the face of the whole universe. As Son of man He was refused and crucified, and as Son of man He is glorified, and will have all things put under His feet.

There is therefore, we apprehend, a difference, however slight, between the terms, the millennium (the thousand years), and the world to come. The former relates rather to the kingdom of Christ during that period, whereas the latter refers to all things being headed up in Christ according to Ephesians 1: 10 — things in heaven, as the apostle there teaches, as well as things on earth. One might well pause for a moment to meditate upon the blessedness of that period. There are, as we have seen, two aspects of it, the heavenly and the earthly. When we speak of the glorious kingdom of Christ, we think mainly of His blessed sway over the earth, as depicted, for example, in Psalm 72; but when we speak of the world to come we include heavenly blessedness in our thoughts as well as earthly. Imagine what it will be when heaven itself will all be pervaded with Christ, as well as earth, when all created things, all exalted intelligences in heaven, will bow with delight at His feet, and joyfully own His supremacy, and when, to borrow inspired language, "every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them" will cry, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." It is not to be wondered at that it is added, And the four living creatures (symbolic representatives of the attributes of God in creation) said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders (representatives of all the redeemed) fell down and worshipped — with full hearts, overcome by the blessedness of the scene, they silently rendered their homage. (Rev. 5: 13, 14.)*

*If any should object that sonship, association with Christ before the Father, and the Father's house, are lost sight of, the answer is that the consideration of these will come before us in the next section. And it may be further added that the enjoyment of all this is for the present moment and not to be deferred to the future. The Father's house is open to us now, even though we shall not be introduced actually into it until after the coming of Christ.

As an illustration of the blessedness of the world to come, we may allude for one moment, before parting with the subject, to the tabernacle. Now the tabernacle in the wilderness was a figure of the universe; and we read that when Moses had finished the work that "then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." (Ex. 40:

34.) In like manner will it be in the world to come. Already, as we read in Ephesians, Christ has ascended up far above all heavens that He might fill all things, and in the period of which we speak He will fill the whole scene, both heaven and earth, with all that God is, and God is love. For then it will have been brought to pass that, having made peace by the blood of His cross, all things, whether things in earth or things in heaven, will be reconciled by Him unto the fulness of the Godhead which was pleased to dwell in Himself.

(4.) THE ETERNAL STATE.

There remains yet another branch of the subject to be considered, and that is, the eternal state which follows upon the world to come. It is often said that scarcely anything is revealed to us of heaven and the blessing of the redeemed in eternity. It is true that we have no detailed presentation of it, but there are many characteristic intimations given which, if combined together, will afford considerable enlightenment upon the subject. The passing over from the close of the kingdom (and the reader will remember that the world to come and the kingdom coincide in their duration) to the eternal state is given in a most remarkable way. The passage is so striking that we cite it in its entirety: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that GOD MAY BE ALL IN ALL." (1 Cor. 15: 22-28.)

One might linger with great delight upon the marvellous scope and beauty of these divine communications, but this might lead us aside from our special object. We only call attention therefore to three things. The first is that, as everything in this scripture flows from the resurrection of Christ, so everything is secured for God and indeed established in the resurrection of His beloved Son. It is truly the demonstration of the completeness of His victory over all the power of the enemy, and the assurance of the accomplishment of all His purposes. Then notice, secondly, the delight of the Spirit of God in pointing out, seven times over, that all things, all enemies, etc., are put under the feet of Christ. It is another proof that He loves to glorify Christ. Thirdly, we must dwell upon the delivering up the kingdom to God the Father; Christ Himself, after all things have been subdued unto Him, becoming subject that God may be all in all. On this last point we may be permitted to enlarge a little, because it throws light upon the position of Christ in eternity, and upon the character of eternity itself.

We learn, then, first of all, that just as the rapture of the saints is preparatory to the appearing, so the kingdom of Christ, when all things will be subdued unto Him, is but the prelude to the eternal state. Without trespassing beyond the due limits of reverence, it may be permitted to us to meditate, if but for a moment, upon the joy of the Lord when His work has been accomplished, in delivering up the kingdom to God, the Father. In all His mission as the sent One of the Father, we know from His own words that His object was to glorify the Father,

and that He realised this object perfectly. As He said on the eve of His departure from the world: "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee;" and also, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." (John 17: 1-4.) In like manner He will glorify God, for He will make good all that God is in His blessed sway of righteousness and peace. Hence it is that "His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed." (Ps. 72: 17.) Then, His work once more completed, He surrenders the kingdom, with gladness of heart, into the hands of Him from whom He received it.

But thereupon another wondrous thing takes place. "When all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." This divine secret can only be revealed in the light of redemption, and, blessed be God, it has been revealed. The Son became incarnate, and He remains incarnate for ever. This mystery has been unveiled through the Apostle Paul: "Whom he [God] did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." (Rom. 8: 29.) When therefore Christ has delivered up the kingdom and Himself becomes subject, it is that He henceforward takes His place as Man amongst the redeemed, but as the Firstborn amongst His brethren. In every circle in which He is pleased to move He must be pre-eminent, must have the first place. His Father is our Father, and His God our God, but throughout eternity, while we are sons with Him before the Father's face, He will ever be the Firstborn, and as we fall at His feet in adoration, we shall delightedly own that He is supreme in that circle of divine affections. Together with this it must be remembered that while the blessed Lord remains Man for ever, He will never cease to be a divine Person, and that the term God, when used absolutely, as at the end of verse 28, includes all that God is as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Before we dwell a little upon the phrase "that God may be all in all," we must inquire where, if we may venture to put it so, Christ will be the Firstborn among many brethren. It is precisely here that the Father's house comes in. It is quite true that saints will be introduced into the Father's house after that they are caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; but, as we have seen, they will soon leave that blessed abode to come out to be displayed in the glory with Christ. Moreover, as is clear from the teaching of the scripture before us, Christ does not take up His place among the redeemed in His final character, as being subject to Him who put all things under Him, until after He has delivered up the kingdom to God, the Father. It is not therefore until after the kingdom that the Father's house, whatever their special relationships with the Father, becomes, in its true and proper sense, the eternal home and dwelling-place of the family of God. The Father's house, where all the divine affections will flow out unceasingly and be fully enjoyed, as well as responded to in the measure of their enjoyment, will thus be a characteristic of the eternal state.

Language of necessity fails when we come to speak of the Son becoming subject that God may be all in all. It is impossible to do more than touch the surface of such an expression. But happily we are told what God in His blessed nature absolutely is. He is love, and it is further revealed that "he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." Again, we are limited by our imperfect apprehensions of the nature of God. Still, we may understand that when God is all in all, all that He is as love will be fully displayed, that this display will fill all heaven with its

bliss, that love will be the glorious atmosphere of the whole scene, and that all the redeemed dwelling in love will dwell in God and God in them. *It will be God everywhere both as object and subject* - God ALL IN ALL, Yes; these are but words, we well know, but though only words, the Holy Spirit may take them up to give to some an inlet into the ineffable blessedness of the eternal state.

There remains one other scripture which treats of the eternal state, namely, Revelation 21: 1-4. It may be felt by some that we are descending to a lower plane in this symbolical description. And yet there are two things given here which add immensely to the statements in the scriptures already considered. The first is that the church retains her special place of nearness and blessing throughout eternity. The holy city, the new Jerusalem, which John saw coming down from God out of heaven. prepared as a bride adorned for her husband we know to be the Lamb's wife (Rev. 19: 7): that is, the church; and, as she descends, she is proclaimed as the tabernacle of God. Men, the saved saints of all periods, except the day of grace, will be around, even as the tribes of Israel encamped around the tabernacle in the wilderness, but the church will be the eternal dwelling-place of God, and He dwells with men, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them, their God, as dwelling in their midst in His tabernacle. Every family, as Paul speaks, will be there, all alike named of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and all taking character from Christ, every family perfect in blessing, however many may be the circles of blessedness around God's tabernacle.

The second point is connected with what we read in verse 5: "And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new." If now we turn to 2 Corinthians 5 this announcement will be better understood. There it is said, "If any man be in Christ, he is [more correctly, *there is*] a new creation [not "creature"]: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (Ver. 17.) Already, even now, as being in Christ, the believer has passed into a new sphere, the sphere of new creation, where all things are of God, a sphere which was inaugurated and established, though ever in the mind of God according to His eternal counsels, by the resurrection of Christ. Now, in Revelation, we are permitted to behold the completion of this new creation. What had hitherto been the object of faith is now presented in actuality in the new heaven and new earth, wherein righteousness has obtained its peaceful abode, and where God can dwell with infinite complacency in His tabernacle, surrounded by the redeemed of every age and land. Surely there is no Christian on the face of the earth who does not rejoice as he contemplates this scene in which God is all in all.

There are two aspects of blessing in this marvellous picture. There is the positive aspect connected with God dwelling in the midst of His people, the eternal source of all their bliss throughout eternity; and there is the negative aspect springing from relief from every form of pressure while passing through this world. It is sometimes said that to look forward to relief is a token of a low state of soul. It may be so oftentimes, perhaps, and it is fully conceded that to anticipate the joy of being with Christ Himself, in all His unspeakable perfections and beauties, is a much more blessed thing. Admitting this to the full, the question may yet be asked, whether God is not far more considerate and tender than we? For He does hold out in this scripture the prospect of eternal relief from all that caused us sorrow and distress while pilgrims in the wilderness. And with what gratitude have burdened hearts, hearts well nigh bursting with grief

through manifold bereavements, in every age, looked forward to this blessed time when sorrow will have passed away for ever before the sunshine of eternal love!

"Lord, haste that day of cloudless ray,

That prospect bright, unfailing;

Where God shall shine in light divine,

In glory never fading."

But it is impossible to pass over the beauty of the language employed, and as we ponder upon it for a moment let it sink deeply into our hearts in the power of the Holy Ghost. The very first words, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," are full of profound, yea, infinite tenderness. It is God Himself, taking each one, as it were, into His everlasting arms, and in His great love wiping away every trace of the sorrows of our earthly pilgrimage. Then — "and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. But ere this time on which we are meditating shall have come, the Lamb of God will have taken away the sin of the world, and death and hades will have been cast into the lake of fire. Death, the last enemy, has thus been destroyed, and, together with death, all the woes, the sorrow, the crying and the pain will disappear, so that nevermore will a single cloud rest upon any heart of all the redeemed. God's rest has thus been reached and His people will share in it for ever through His unspeakable grace, blessed be His name! And He reveals all this to us now, that we may live in the light of it through faith, and find in it, not only an antidote to present trials, but also a blessed encouragement to have our minds upon things above where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God.

We have now reached the end of our meditations upon these blessed subjects. It is only in outline, we are quite aware, that they have been presented. The reader, who desires to enter more fully into them, will find no difficulty, with the Bible in his hand, in following out more fully, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, these several related themes. And it may help to this end if, in concluding these observations, we give a concise summary of the whole subject.

First of all then, after some introductory remarks, in which it was insisted that the rapture was the immediate object before the believer, we sought to show the relation of the rapture to the appearing, and it was plainly seen that the going in with Christ at the rapture is preparatory to coming out with Him in glory at the appearing. Then a rapid glance at the teaching of the epistles made it abundantly evident that their several writers united in their testimony that the appearing of Christ is the goal set before the heart of the believer in his responsible life and service. Consequent upon the appearing of Christ there are two aspects of the same period, the establishment and glory of the kingdom, which will be universal, and the world to come. A difference was pointed out between these two things. In the kingdom, Christ will reign over the whole earth; there is the heavenly side of the kingdom, but this is termed the kingdom of the Father. (See Matt. 13: 43.) The world to come is put in subjection to Christ as Son of man, and

includes things in heaven, things on earth, and indeed things under the earth. (Rev. 5: 13.) All alike will be headed up in Him as the glorious and universal Head. At the close of the thousand years, after the judgment of the great white throne, Christ will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, and further, when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.*

*It is very interesting to notice that the last mention of Christ in the scriptures is in connection with His delivering up the kingdom. This act must be subsequent to His session on the great white throne. He is not seen again for the simple reason that in eternity God — Father, Son, and Holy Ghost — is all in all. But we know, as has been explained, that Christ abides for ever as the Firstborn among many brethren.

Eternity is thus entered upon, and the veil being lifted, we are permitted to behold Christ as the glorified Man, the Firstborn among many brethren. Thus the Father's house, with its many mansions, is now inhabited by all the redeemed, and in every circle or family Christ is centre and supreme. God is the fount and source of all the blessing, and unto Him will be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end ("unto all generations of the age of ages"). Amen.

One additional remark may be allowed. From what has been said, it follows that the purposes of God do not reach their full accomplishment until the eternal state. This is the end God has always in view, and towards which, all through the ages, He has ever been working. And when this end has been realised, He will rest in His love in its completest sense, and joy for ever over His redeemed with singing. In the meantime, the happiness of the believer will be in communion with God in His objects, His desires and affections. May He work mightily in the hearts of His beloved people, in these last days, to bring them ever into closer fellowship with His own heart, and to an ever deepening knowledge of Himself and of His mind, for His own glory. Amen.