

The Christian Hope Consistent with Events Revealed in Prophecy

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It is beyond controversy that the Lord Jesus set His disciples in the position of waiting for His return in glory, and that He attached the utmost value to the constancy their love in expecting Him habitually as their sure and proximate hope. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately." (Luke 12: 35, 36.)

Precisely the same principle reappears in what the Holy Ghost gave by the apostle from first to last. Thus in his earliest epistle: "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." (1 Thess. 4: 15-17.) Take a middle communication: "Behold I show you a mystery, 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.) Take a later. "For our conversation 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." (Phil. 3: 20, 21.) Take one of his latest: "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 Saviour Jesus Christ." (Titus 2: 11-13.)

Nor is it otherwise with the last surviving apostle who closes the canon of scriptures: "Behold I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." (Rev. 3: 11.) "I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that heareth say, come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.... He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." (Rev. 22: 16, 17, 20.) Accordingly as Christ's coming they knew not how soon was the hope laid down uniformly in the New Testament, so even scepticism owns that it was universally believed by the early Christians.

But time passed on, and faith became feeble, and hope deferred made the heart sick, and the taunts of incredulity, which looks not beyond appearances began to tell on souls that ceased to hold fast the grace and truth of Christ and thus gravitated toward the world out of which they had been called, not more surely to serve God than to wait for His Son from heaven; so in modern times many have been driven from this position by an improper use of the Lord's delay. They have been frightened by the adversary. They have shrunk from the world's unbelieving contempt founded on a very short and imperfect acquaintance with the word of God. Infidelity indeed is always superficial; and the children of God do not well to be thus moved. It matters not who the adversary may be, they should never yield the position regarding His word, nor allow themselves to be or seem ashamed of waiting for the Lord Jesus, which the New Testament shows was to have been given to and taken by the church of God, and that too, we must observe, in its brightest days, when the power of the Holy Ghost was ungrieved and

the apostles who were the authoritative communicators of the mind of God still remained. It is under these circumstances we find the Christians of old habitually expecting the Son of God from heaven. Time passed on; the delay seemed long; and many a believer, judging from appearances which seemed to contradict their hope, gave up their constancy of expectation, giving way to their own reasonings and the influences around them. This is always unwise; it is worse, it is a sin, because it virtually arraigns God Himself, who maintains His authority now by His word. The day is coming when He will assert and vindicate it in power, when it will be no question of believing only, but those who dispute His authority and disobey His word will be judged. But now we are put to the test in a moral way by subjection to the written word of God.

At present I am undertaking to show that the simplest view is the truest, and that the lowly faithful cleaving to the words of the Lord Jesus will stand the severest test. In point of fact it is so constantly in divine things. For the church of God was never meant to be a school, still less to be confined to such as are of the highest form. The church forgets its commission when it affects to be a philosophical clique of disciples who flatter themselves that they at least are wise and intelligent. According to the mind of God it was intended to embrace every child of God walking as such. It was meant not merely to have them but to have them together — to have them as one; and in fact this miserable departure from the mind of God practically has given an immense impulse to unbelieving thoughts which slight and judge the word of God in respect to the ground, manner, measure and matter of our hope: for what indeed has been spared? Our subject, however, is the compatibility of the christian hope with the revelation of events according to prophecy; and I must show that no events predicted by the Lord, or the holy apostles and prophets, in the slightest degree set aside that hope, for the two things are perfectly consistent. I shall show further that these predicted events do not even modify the hope, but that the hope governs them; the true outlook for the soul being Christ's coming and receiving us to Himself, not my death but His return.. The prophetic intimations of events only fall into their proper place where that hope is kept firm.

The Jewish believers had long been accustomed to prophecy. We can understand this. They were an earthly people; and prophecy speaks of the earth, without opening heaven. He that came down from heaven as God, and went up again, not merely as God but as man, He it is who not only had the heavens opening on Him but by grace opened heaven for us. We belong to the opened heavens, because we belong to Christ who is there, on the footing of His work and not of His person only. For He came down in love and is gone up in righteousness, and this righteousness a justifying righteousness which gives us the very same title as Himself. Where this is understood, the difference between the christian hope and prophecy is seen. Heaven is characteristically the place belonging to the Christian, as earth was to Israel. God promised the best place here below to them, as well as every conceivable blessing, suited to such a people. He promised to make them the most exalted nation on earth, not only blessed but a blessing. No faults of Israel can annul that promise in the long run. Certainly it is not yet fulfilled. As always, there is first the trial or responsibility of the creature, followed by sovereign grace on God's part. In Israel's past history, we have had the creature tried; the future will behold God's mercy (Rom. 11) accomplishing everything according to His word, and giving freely according to divine goodness.

On the other hand it is impossible for the earth to be a place of real joy and blessing except through Jesus and His redemption. For Israel were sinners like others, and if they are to be blessed, they must be saved, and there is no salvation but by Him who died and rose for us. But then there is more. The cross of the Lord Jesus is the fullest proof of Israel's iniquity and rebellion against God. Hence meanwhile God acts on it to open, by Him who is now gone into His presence on high, a nosy

and living way into the holiest. This and more than this God had not promised to Israel or any other nation. He had never given away heavenly glory to any. He was free to bestow it on whom He would, and He now does give it to Christ and the church. Not that one doubts that the Old Testament saints, looked for it heavenly city; and I am sure that they will have it. If they looked for a better country, they will be there. But heaven is no small place. It cannot be measured by so many miles like the earth. Heaven is immense, and there will be ample verge and various scenes for the display of God's glory. The saints of Old Testament and of New Testament will be there. There is room enough and to spare for all. In the New Testament it is we find God bringing out all the elements of truth contained in the Old, but withal He brings out far more. He had secrets, things never divulged in the course of the earlier dispensation; but now they are. And the reason is manifest. Till the Son of God actually came, it would not have been suitable to the glory of God to have revealed what was to be specially between Him and His Son. The Holy Ghost sent down from heaven loves to bring out what the disciples could not bear before His resurrection. But now that redemption is accomplished, all is fully out, and very particularly that broad and deep and essential distinction which will nosy be set out, as God enables me, between the prophecy of events and the heavenly hope which the Holy Ghost has given us — a hope which was announced by Jesus, but which was to be explained with needed fulness by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven when the disciples could bear it. The great difference is that, as prophecy treats of the earth, so also it deals with times and seasons, with peoples and nations, with tribes and tongues, whereas the heavenly hope is independent of all that. Are these tribes and peoples and tongues on high? Is it any question there in the presence of God of days and weeks and times and years? The difference between earth and heaven is thus easily seen. The christian hope, as it is let into our hearts from heaven, so is it as completely different from any prospect connected with the earth as the light of heaven is from a lamp, which, however useful in the darkness of the world, is as nothing compared with the light of day.

Nor is the figure of the lamp compared with daylight a mere idea of mine, but expressly furnished in the word itself. The Apostle Peter points out the selfsame distinction by this very comparison. (2 Peter 1.)

In writing to Christians, who were once Jews and who were therefore familiar with prophecy, he tells them that they did well to take heed to the prophetic word. Their being Christians did not set aside what they had from God before. The Old Testament is in no way or degree, either as a whole or in part, blotted out by the New, but on the contrary shines more brightly and is understood incomparably better, when by the Holy Spirit the New is apprehended. Force is thus given to the Old, which enables the Christian to comprehend beyond the Jew. Take again the professing Christian that contends for Jewish forms, as a priest, sacrifice, or sanctuary now. Does he understand them? Not in the least So if you have ever talked with an intelligent Jew, say a Rabbi, on the Old Testament, you will have seen how utterly dark he is regarding his own scriptures; and the more intelligent he is, the more palpable his ignorance of all beyond letter or tradition; because the fact of his general intelligence proves that his state proceeds from want not of natural capacity but of divine light. No matter what his activity of mind or stores of reading may be, they only disclose the exceeding barrenness of the land. On the other hand the Old Testament is lighted up with a brilliancy un mistakeably divine, and its meaning is unfolded in its depth and fulness, when one enters into the true place of the church of God through knowing Christ Himself. And never is the church discerned apart from Christ; and if He be not seen as Head, in vain men essay to preach up the church; for though Christ may be truly known and enjoyed by the soul without seeing the church, you cannot in any case apprehend the church of God without seeing His headship of it. Thus Romanists and Catholics of all sorts are apt to talk much about the church; but they use it as a shroud, as a dense covering from sight of the glory of the Lord Jesus. There you have utter

darkness; and yet the church is of all things the most put forward in pretension. When the place of Christ and the church is really known, we begin to understand the Old Testament better, and every part becomes to us full of light instead of the cloud it once seemed. But those that are under its forms (christened I may say) do not understand the Old Testament, but only such as know Christ and our relationship to Him as Lord and Saviour, Priest, and Head.

So it is in regard to the christian hope also. When the heart is filled with it, one understands prophecy a great deal better than those who have only prophecy before them. The Christians that had been Jews were first slow to enter at all into the heavenly hope; and, when they were beginning to get a little better knowledge, the confusion of the two exposed them to the danger of letting prophecy slip without taking in the christian hope. Such too is the state in which many christians are at the present day. They understand neither; they have not got hold of the christian hope, and they do not pretend to understand prophecy: perhaps indeed they think it cannot be understood at all. Probably the same persons would think it presumptuous to know their sins forgiven: seeing that they do not understand the gospel, it is hard to expect them to understand what is outside the soul. One could scarcely look for a soul to enter into the revelations of God in His word about other subjects so remote if they had not submitted to God's righteousness for their own souls. Once Christ is thus received, we begin to find what a key He is to unlock all the rest.

We see then that Peter, in writing to those christian Jews, contrasts the heavenly hope with prophecy; the difference between them, which really involves and settles the compatibility of the two things, depends on this very distinction. Thus he says, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy" (or the prophetic word confirmed) "whereunto ye do well that ye take heed as unto a light," really a lamp, "that shineth in a dark place until the day dawn and the day-star arise in your hearts.

Here prophecy is compared to the lamp that shines in a squalid place; the heavenly hope to daylight with above all the person of Christ as the day star, for that He is thus referred to cannot, in my judgment, be questioned. You will observe it is not "till the day come," "till the arrival of the day of the Lord " or the like. It is "till the day dawn and the day-star arise in your hearts." It is the heart getting hold of the heavenly hope; it is no more than a question of the heart. It is not the day arising as the sun of righteousness upon the world. It is the heart now having Christ as its constant hope, and so in the spirit and light of the day before it shines on the earth by and by. The apostle says that the lamp of prophecy is excellent until one has a better light, not the earthly lamp brighter, but a different kind of light, even that of day, and above all connected with the person of Christ, the day-star arising in the heart.

This contrast of the apostle gives us exactly the nature of the christian hope, because it is not merely a great change anticipated for mankind and creation; still less is it the illusion of the world being made better. It is not evil judged, or righteousness triumphant, however great and excellent. We do expect both; but they belong to prophecy, not their hope. Prophecy shows Babylon is to be destroyed and Antichrist judged. It shows the Roman empire by and by reorganized, with a head over it, when the west gets weary of little powers, and wants to have a chief opposed to the great leader of the east. Alas! all are only for destruction. If these things take place (and I am persuaded that prophecy shows they will, and that events already transpiring are leading on to them), they have nothing to do with the christian hope. In looking into prophecy, we find ourselves on the ground of measured times and seasons; but these have nothing to do with our waiting for Christ from heaven. What has His coming to receive us to Himself above to do with judgments? What has our entrance into the Father's house to do directly with changes on earth? When the Lord comes to translate the saints to those mansions, He does not rectify the earth, He takes Christians away to heaven; but this does not alter the

face of the earth. Undoubtedly a vast change will come in due time, and we may see the order of events a little later on. But I now speak of the essential difference between the two; and I affirm that the christian hope is essentially bound up with heaven, while prophecy is occupied with earthly judgment and subsequent blessing; for evil, being that which prevails on the earth, must be judged to bring in a better state. Man as such has no title to go up to heaven. It is a matter of pure grace; and it belongs to Christ to show us that grace, and a part of His grace is for Him to come and present us in the Father's house. We have no claim to be there. It is the Son of God who according to the efficacy of redemption and in His own love will take us away from the world to be with Himself. This is the heavenly hope.

But there is a great deal more than this in scripture, and it will be shown that the attempt to bring in the earthly events of prophecy before Christ comes for the rapture of the saints is a mere misapprehension of persons who, in my judgment, are but imperfectly acquainted with the word of God. More mature and profound study of the word only confirms the impression of new-born and spiritual souls that we should be constantly waiting for Christ. No doubt there are divine revelations about what is coming to pass in the world, and serious and radical changes they are; but they never interfere with the christian's expectation of Christ from day to day. Quite distinct from them stands that heavenly hope, which they are not allowed in any part of the New Testament to overlay or even modify.

Let us look at a few scriptures; and, as our first instance, at Luke 12. There not only is the disciple put in the place of waiting for Christ, but the greatest possible stress is laid on this that there should arise nothing to prevent his constantly looking for the Lord to meet him in the air. In verses 35 and 36 we read, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he will return from the wedding; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately." There is no hindrance here for the disciple, no revealed delay on the part of the Master. His return was to be an immediate hope. Indeed the thought of any interposed delay is what the Lord is here arming the heart against most sedulously. Not only does He insist on the time being unknown as a motive for always expecting Him, but also that the state of the heart should be such that nothing should hinder an immediate response to Christ when He comes again.

Turn we now to the Gospel of John. Here the Lord presents His coming as a question of His own love to have His own with Himself above, and not in the least as referring to men on the earth, or dependent on signs, changes, and events that must previously take place. In John 14 the Lord says "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." It is clear that this is totally independent of any movements here below. It is the heavenly hope, and this in its greatest completeness, not placed in connection with any earthly circumstances whatever. We have nothing of its order in relation to other things, but simply its character. It is just a question of the love of the Son and of the Father. He was not to be like the Jewish Messiah an object of sight; He was going to be invisible. He had been here a man before their eyes; but He was going away, and as God was an object of faith, so should He be: in truth He was God, even as the Father and the Spirit. He tells them not to let His departure distress them, for He was going to do better for them than could possibly be if He remained here. To have abode as they on earth, or even to have established the kingdom as returning to it, would have been in connection with His Messiahship; but His going to heaven was based on redemption as well as on His Sonship. The one links with the Son of David, the other with His divine glory; the one is connected with earth, the other with the Father's house — no doubt that house in which the Saviour is gone to prepare mansions for us in

heaven; but heaven is not so contracted as some think; and all heaven is not the Father's house, which is where the Father shows His special love to the Son. Of it Jesus says that there "are many mansions," not merely one for the Father and the Son, but ample room for His risen saints. "I go," He says, "to prepare a place for you;" because it was for those who were altogether strangers to such companionship above, a totally new thing for a Jew as such to expect. The constant expectation of the people was power and blessing coming down to earth, not at all the hope of being taken from earth to heaven, to enjoy glory in communion with the glorified Son of Man.

Here be it observed that in my opinion those called premillennialists have often brought a great stigma on the truth, by representing the earth as the future scene of our blessedness. Indeed such an idea is not peculiar to premillennialists; many theologians, such as Dr. Chalmers for example, had the same poverty of thought. A renovated earth for the risen saints was the idea from some of the early Fathers down to our day: which to my mind is not only unscriptural but exceedingly low. The earth, no matter how blessed, will never be the meet abode for the risen and glorified. The heavens are high above the earth, not only in locality but in character; and it is in heavenly places that we are blessed, it is there we know our portion in Christ even now. It is not therefore the earth, however transmuted or metamorphosed it may be, that is to form the sphere of our glory and home with Christ. I admit there will be a blessed change in that day on the earth; but this will be for Israel and the nations or Gentiles; whereas we by becoming Christians have ceased to be either Jews or Gentiles. We have acquired our character from Christ, and have a blessing suited to Him on high. Until souls have a knowledge of this, they do not understand Christianity. The Christian is not merely a blessed man; for blessed then will be the Jews, and blessed even still the Gentiles. But the Christian is one taken out of all that belongs to him naturally and is put already by the power of the Spirit in a supernatural place. He knows it now by faith. It will be visible to all when the Lord comes. Accordingly, the Lord Jesus, who knew so well the Father's house, announces that He is coming for us and will bring us into the place He is preparing for us now: He will have us with Himself and as Himself.

This then is the Christian's heavenly hope. It is entirely independent of a revealed date or announced delay. The Lord never fixed nor disclosed it in His word; He made it entirely dependent on His grace to those He loves; as the Father has placed times and seasons in His own authority. On this the church has to depend; on this every Christian was meant to confide as he waits for Christ. The Christian knows Him whom he believes, that He may delay, and that His delay is salvation for those who otherwise must perish everlastingly. Though it may be keeping himself for a little out of His rest and glory with Christ. the Christian can delight that others also by the delay are going to be blessed of Christ. This is the definitely assigned reason for the delay which has nothing whatever to do with the judgments, etc., in the world of which prophecy treats. What have the seals, trumpets or vials to do with our joining Christ for heavenly glory? This last has no doubt to do with the secret counsels of the Father who is gathering out whom He pleases to make heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ, but this has nothing to do with earthly revolutions.

If we look at the other Gospels we find many notable events predicted. We learn that the Jews, now scattered, are to be gathered once more; that their present misery is not all, for that they must pass through still deeper tribulation, but afterwards be delivered and blessed by the Lord Jesus according to the promises made to the fathers. The apostles in the rest of the New Testament confirm this fully. Thus the epistle to the Romans, the grandest *exposé* of fundamental christian doctrine, most carefully shows that, however God may by the gospel meet sinners in indiscriminate grace, He has in no way forgotten His promises to His ancient people, His present heavenly purpose does not turn aside his intention of bringing the earth into the liberty of glory. The groaning creation shall yet rejoice under the second

Man, when the day is come for the manifestation of the sons of God. Nor did the apostle withhold from men the solemn fact that God has appointed a day in which He is going to judge (not *the* dead only, as it the end of all, but the habitable earth in righteousness by the man He has appointed, even Jesus risen from among the dead. Preliminary judgments too must take place and mighty operations in warning and testimony, which more or less fully are predicted in the prophetic word.

But here again I come to the very important question; — are these or any other public events revealed as occurring before the Lord comes to receive His heavenly saints? are they to take place at the same time? or do they occur after?

In dealing with these questions let us refer for a few moments to the Epistles to the Thessalonians, which are allowed to have been the first Paul wrote. They were written to young Christians that knew but little and that consequently were in no small danger of mistakes. In fact both epistles were written to correct misapprehension or error. What we find corrected in the first epistle was in regard to the dead saints; what was dealt with in the second touched rather the living saints. When the first epistle was written, the Thessalonian saints were so filled with the constant expectancy of the Lord's return for them that they were quite taken by surprise when some of their brethren fell asleep. Could anything show more vividly how the early church were looking out day by day for Christ? They thought their deceased brethren must lose much at that blessed moment because they had fallen asleep before Christ came. Such is the evident meaning of their agitation. Others may try from their mistake in this detail to get rid of the truth; they held rightly in the main but many who speak flippantly of the Thessalonians are in a more dangerous case habitually than ever were the Thessalonian believers. The latter had imbibed the thought somehow that the Christians were not to die before Jesus came. Now the Lord had never said so, nor had the Holy Spirit through the apostle ever taught so. It was an entirely human inference. Now no inference is a matter of faith. It depends of course on our soundness in deducing consequences from premisses, under which too a flaw may lurk. It is very important for us to remember that in divine things we should look for the direct testimony of God's word, at all events for a revealed principle to guide us. In this case the Thessalonians, having trusted their own minds, could not understand that any Christians should die before Christ's coming. So when this befell some of their number, they were grieved beyond measure. The apostle writes to disabuse their minds of error on this point. (1 Thess. 4: 13, 14.) "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 [have fallen asleep through Jesus] will God bring With him."

How strikingly different is the kind of comfort men habitually administer now! The thought they present to the bereaved (throughout Christendom) almost always is that their friends are gone to heaven. Nobody denies this in the case of deceased believers. They depart to be with Christ. They are not consigned to some place of detention in obscurity and seclusion from the Lord; they are imprisoned in no subterranean abode far from that heaven to which even here they belonged. Absent from the body they are at home with the Saviour, which is far better. If it were only a poor robber before his death converted on the cross, he was that very day with Christ: such and so great and so immediate the efficacy of His blood. Is Paradise a garden of gloom, not of delights? Not even the earthly paradise of Adam in itself had a cloud; and is not the Paradise of God far brighter than where the first man was tempted by the devil? Error on this head I refer to, not only because it is pernicious but as showing how quickly the early church departed from the truth, for the notion here combated was, so far as the early Fathers speak all but universal, and to this day the Greek and other ancient bodies are under similar illusions. They conceive that departed Christians are waiting in darkness till the resurrection, and

therefore offer prayers on their behalf. They do not pray to them like the still more deluded Romanists; but they think their spirits are detained in that place of need till Christ comes.

It is plain however from the word of God that the deceased saints are with Christ, on the one hand, and on the other that, though with Him, their own state is imperfect till their bodies are raised. They only can enjoy the fulness of the glory God intends for them with Christ, and this not only in spirit but in body. There may be meanwhile all that the soul can take in, but it is not perfection till soul and body together share Christ in glory. Perfection will be when we are outwardly and inwardly and completely like Christ. So say the Scriptures, and they are always right. According to this was the comfort the apostle here gives the Thessalonian brethren. He points to the reunion at the coming of the Lord. How all is brought about we learn in the verses which follow (15-17), "For this we say unto you in the word of the Lord, that we the living that remain unto the coming of the Lord shall in nowise prevent" — it is here an old English word for *precede*, those that have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with archangel's voice, and with trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we the living that remain shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." If there be difference, the saints that may have fallen asleep come under the energy of the Lord's glory rather before the rest. But the truth is that in a moment both are to be caught up together. The Thessalonians were therefore troubling themselves without reason. They need not sorrow as the rest. It is right to feel grief for things as they are; and a miserable thing to treat sorrow, shame, death, sin, with indifference: the Lord when here sorrowed, as none else, never as those who have no hope. The truth brings in the Lord's coming and our resurrection to the richest comfort of the soul, instead of letting it harden and accustom itself to the consequences of the fall as inevitable. The second Man is looked to, instead of resignation to the miseries of the first.

On the face of it what can be clearer than that the moderns mistake in thinking that death is the Lord's coming to the Christian? Do you wonder that any should say so? It was only this morning I was reading the book of a Divinity Professor, and a believer too, which treated thus of the Lord's coming at death. Certainly it finds no countenance in scripture. What sort of doctrine is that? His presence will be deliverance from death for those that look for Him. It is the express comfort against death and grief about it. At death we each go to be with Christ; at His coming He will take us all to be with Himself. Such erroneous teaching ought to be met firmly; and, if any do not know better than to teach such things, it would be well if Christians did not listen, at least on such a theme. The worst is that it infects almost everything else unless it be the immutable truth of the Godhead and of Christ's person. They are only corrupting God's testimony by perverting the scriptures on the great province of our hope and prophecy too. The coming of the Lord Jesus is just the converse of the christian's going to Him. The latter is but individual departure, the former is the glad moment when He will communicate His own joy to all that are His. The confounding of these two things is not only mischievous to the soul, but it also obscures the glory of the Lord Jesus. The Lord's coming is thus really in contrast with death; the consolation which grace vouchsafes in the sorrows we taste, the ultimate and only complete triumph of Christ over death in all its forms as far as the Christian is concerned. "Wherefore," he says, "comfort one another with these words."

In the next chapter the apostle enlarges on the day of the Lord. "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," that is, men generally on the earth not christians, "shall say, peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." In the presence of the Lord, 1 Thess. 4, we saw only the saints

concerned; but in the day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5) we have the world involved. There is therefore an evident difference between them, though the presence of the Lord may go on in the day of the Lord and so include it. He will come to receive His own, taking them away from the earth to be with Himself on high; but the day of the Lord is His advent in judgment of man's pride and indifference, delusion and positive rebellion here below. When they shall say, peace and safety, sudden destruction soon follows. Accordingly nothing is said about taking up to heaven in chapter 5; nor is anything said about destruction in chapter 4. Who can fail to observe the propriety of all this? For it is simply a question of the testimony of scripture. Cannot the Lord come to take His own on high without showing Himself at that moment except to those for whom He comes? He who on the score of difficulty cavils against this takes a dangerous path. For no one denies that shortly after the Lord will display the saints with Himself.. That will be His day, a time of bitter anguish, because it will be His dealing with the earth and man apostate here below. But the coming of the Lord to translate His own to heaven is a different order of things. I do not speak now of "the coming of the Son of Man" because this, being the express relation in which He judges, necessarily modifies His coming. When He is seen coming or present as Son of Man, it is in reference to the earth. But I do not go tonight beyond the broad features which most need.

In the second epistle there is quite another point of view. The Thessalonians had been meanwhile agitated by certain persons who told them that their then persecutions or other trials, for they seem to have been passing through sore tribulation, were the beginning of the day of the Lord — that it was not impending only, as is commonly said, but actually come. On this account they were greatly troubled and shaken, and Paul writes this fresh epistle to banish their fears and settle them in confidence of the hope once more. "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming (or *presence*, for this is the meaning of the word) of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind or be troubled." Assuredly it was the excitement not of hope but of anxiety and terror. It is no picture of sanguine people in haste looking for Christ, but of souls alarmed by a false apprehension that the day of the Lord had actually set in. Do you object to my going in this farther than the English version warrants? That version represents the errorists to have said (and this too pretending every authority for it, even to a letter from the apostle) "that the day of Christ is at hand." It is now pretty generally known that the true text and proper translation of the last clause is "that the day of the Lord is present." I am old enough to remember the time when scarcely a single person in the world seemed to be aware of this; and now, I am thankful to say, there are only a few prejudiced men to dispute it. It can scarcely be doubted that the present revisers will alter the version here, and alter it for the better too. I was agreeably surprised to see an American divine among the first who bowed to the truth in this passage; and now nobody who can pretend to be well informed of the grounds for a sound judgment on it makes any question about it, unless it be a few individuals committed in earlier days to a strong pre-judgment against it. The right reading too, I must add, as conceded now on all sides is not Χριστοῦ but Κυρίου, not "of Christ" but "of the Lord." This being read, the true translation would be "as that the day of the Lord is present."

Further no person can give a correct or intelligible meaning to the words as they stand in our version, at least without contradicting other scriptures. All existing interpretations founded on the common rendering betray the greatest possible perplexity or worse. Some years ago glancing over Professor Jowett's book on these epistles I could not but feel that every remark on the whole or on details displayed gross darkness. If he wrote with an unbelieving eye, without even using aright what knowledge of the language he possessed, it fares little better with men truer to inspiration. The false version had blinded all to its true sense.

Some of the interpreters too conceived the thought that the "letter as from us" referred to Paul's first epistle; but it is not so. A spurious letter is meant (not the apostle's at all), which taught that the day of the Lord was actually arrived — that day of trial and anguish and darkness, "that day" of divine dealing and destruction on earth. The rumour accordingly filled them with great uneasiness. They thought that the day of Jehovah or of judgment on the earth, for this is the idea, had already come. What does the apostle do? He recalls them to the Christian hope, saying "we beseech you, brethren, by (or, for the sake of) the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and 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 the Lord has set in (or, is present)." Observe what a light this casts on the subject before us. He urges them by their bright hope not to be alarmed by the false alarm grounded on a pretension to prophetic authority. The day of the Lord belongs to prophecy; the Lord's coming to gather us together is the proper christian hope. He urges them by this hope, about which they had been instructed in the previous epistle, not to be alarmed by the novel object of terror the enemy was foisting in.

Then the apostle gives no little information. He assures them that the day cannot come unless there be first the falling away, or apostasy, and the man of sin be revealed. He does not say these things must occur before Christ comes, but beyond doubt before the day. They are prophetic events and cannot transpire until certain revealed antecedents have run their course, but there is no epoch set for the coming of the Lord, which is designedly unrevealed so as to preserve the saints in the constant attitude of waiting for Lord. Certain signal changes among men and new dealings of God are notified in the prophetic word, but not the Lord's coming to receive us, that the christian might and in order that he should be always expecting. We know that upon earth there may be many a revolution that will dash the fond anticipations of men; but our hope is certain, even One who has passed through death and will shortly come again for us, whose love and truth we can trust as thoroughly as His power. Our hope has nothing to do with the changeful history of mankind or the nations; it is bound up with the divine purpose of God in Christ for the heavens and the earth. Still we know there are to be such events. The revelation of these events however in no way interferes with the christian hope, but on the contrary the christian hope puts them off, so to speak; that is to say, it governs them, not they it. Hence the apostle says "that day shall not come unless there come (not "a" but) *the* falling away first." He refers to the awful state of apostasy from all revelation when christianity will be no longer publicly owned, when the Jews themselves shall once more return to idols and the worship of man as their Messiah and Jehovah, when not a nation on earth shall uphold the law or profess the truth of God.

What is more, I am persuaded that the dissolving process even now rapidly goes on, and that the yielding of some and the anxiety manifested by others of the various powers to get rid of our connection with christianity is in the hands of the enemy a means for bringing about this apostasy. Not that their indifference to the authority of God in His truth will harm the church of God; whose happiness or hopes ought always to have been above the nations of the earth, centring only in Christ. Miserably has the full blessing long been blighted, and their testimony marred and ruined by mixing up with the world. Still if a nation once adopted the profession of christianity, it is a serious thing when political motives, with a background of infidelity, induce the desire to abandon it. For no doubt the standard of the cross was once raised by those who would now blot out the public recognition of it. Before many years elapse there will be no such thing as an oath or any other sign in human affairs, which brings in God. Everything that would serve as a witness to what God says, requires, gives, or is to judge, will be put away. The great object the devil has in view, no matter what men who despise prophecy may think, is the apostasy, or open abandonment of all confession of Christ and the true God. Nor is this all. Besides the apostasy there will be the man of sin. In contrast with the man of righteousness, who is gone up to heaven, the man of sin will set himself up on earth, exalting himself

above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he sits down in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. He will take the place of being God, not merely in the world but in His temple, not simply in earthly things but in what is peculiarly divine.

And even now among the most enlightened or at least pretentious and energetic nations of the earth, there are many, some of them professional divines, who believe that the day of christianity is past, that the gospel is old and effete, on the point of waning away, as the first covenant was when the Epistle to the Hebrews was written. They believe that there was once the law, then the gospel; that both are now about to be numbered in the past, though not without influence on the future; still that as systems, the one as the other is bygone, the one about to give place to another and more glorious state, not by God's becoming man, but by man's becoming God. They believe that man as such is the fullest manifestation of God and that there is no being higher or better than the race, This they confess as the true advent and the real coming to reign and judge; when these rights are conceded, they imagine the results will be auspicious and bright beyond all conception for humanity. Germany (and I mention Germany because of its successful stride into power) is the great mover in all this glorification of man: France in a gross but petty way has been working to a similar issue; but the truth is that it will be exhibited throughout the west, not excepting the lands in which we dwell.

These dismal horrors are approaching. Some perhaps yet expect the gospel to prevail. O slow to believe the prophets! Who told them that the gospel ever was intended to convert the world? Rather was it sent to take man out of the world. We ought to have the most perfect confidence that the world will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah as the waters cover the sea. But it will be brought about by divine power, by the Lord Jesus Himself. It will not be the fruit of man's efforts, but to the praise of the Saviour in person. He alone who once suffered will deal effectually with the proud and God-defying lawlessness of which scripture we have seen, speaks, more than anything ever yet known; for the corruption of the best is always the worst. Judaism perverted was bad enough: but corrupted christianity is incomparably worse. "The mystery of iniquity," he goes on to say, "doth already work; only there is one who now letteth (or hindereth), until he be taken out of the way." It is the Holy Spirit, who will not always control as now, but allow evil to take its course. This will be the removal of the hindrance spoken of here. "And then shall that lawless one be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness (or appearance) of his coming."

The personal manifestation of the Lord's presence will effect this. As He will come to receive His own, so He will burst forth in visible judgment of the world. Not a word drops about the epiphany of His coming when He takes His own to heaven. It is not only His coming, but the appearing of it, when He deals with the lawless one. He comes to take His own first; after this He manifests His coming and destroys the lawless one.

Thus the christian hope retains its unbroken and unobscured power as the immediate object before the believer. There is nothing else to intercept the view, no previous events revealed which interpose between the heart or eye and the coming of the Lord. The, Lord intended to keep the saints always looking for Him thus. How could the early church have waited for Him otherwise? Do you join with the infidel Gibbon in saying that the early church was wrong? Indeed it was what the apostles taught and wrote, who were as right as the moderns are wrong. Will you for your tradition make void God's inspired word? Clearly the only way to keep the church constantly expecting Christ was to reveal no events as coming between. Thus the sanctioned practice and the theory of the Christian's habitually looking for Christ are not only intelligible but in perfect harmony with the word of God, whose wisdom shines the more we examine and understand it. There was no mistake in apostolic teaching or in its

legitimate fruits. The Thessalonians were in danger from confounding the events of prophecy with the hope; the moderns have fallen into the pit whence apostolic vigilance extricated our earlier brethren. If there are revealed events which must take place before Christ comes, then clearly we could not with intelligence be constantly expecting Him. If the inspired apostles were right in setting Christians to be ever looking out for Christ, those are wrong now who have slipped away from that hope. But God is recalling His saints to wait for Christ as of old, and they are thus waiting. Indeed I fully believe that the cry is going forth, "Behold the bridegroom! go ye out to meet him."

Do you still affirm that there were necessary delays? It is not a little remarkable how our Lord's parables are so shaped as never to reveal anything really inconsistent with expecting Him always. As far as the parable teaches (and this is the point), it might be the same persons that went out first, then slept, finally on awaking went out again to meet Him, and went in to the marriage. Not that the Spirit said that He was necessarily coming in their lifetime. We can now see how room was left for His tarrying in fact. But the truth was so put that those Christians then, as at every time since, should be expecting Christ; and this because the Christian hope is independent of earthly events. Earthly events are distinctly predicted; but they are never said to be before the Lord's coming to remove us to the Father's house. When the Lord takes up His earthly people, He begins to deal with the earth, and then predicted changes have their place. There will be the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom to all nations during that interval. Doubtless there will be an immense work and its fruit after the Lord has removed to heaven those waiting to join Himself in the air, but those (save the martyrs) quickened during that interval will live in the bright days of the kingdom.

Nevertheless as heaven is higher than the earth, so is our hope incomparably beyond theirs. From ignorance of this and confusion many a Christian was stumbled by those who insisted that the risen saints dwell with Christ on earth in the millennial reign. For who that has the sense of heavenly glory could give it up for all the blessings of the earth? On the other hand there is no small defect in the faith of such as think that God made the world to be for ever as miserable a place as it is now or only a shade better. He has made known to us His purpose to wrest earth and mankind upon it out of the hands of the destroyer. He will assuredly purify it and bring it back to more than pristine beauty, and the race to joy and blessedness, entirely to the praise of Jesus. The man who suffered is the One who is glorified and is about to appear.

Had there been time now to have glanced at the visions of the Revelation, it would have been easy to confirm what is here advanced. But it appears to me wiser not to encumber minds with details. Quite enough has been said to prove the point before us, and a very important point it is. Nor do I doubt that you will find, as you study the New Testament, that a considerable part of scripture falls under one or other of these two heads. As with everything else in the Bible, the moment you possess the real clue to a truth of God, you have that which explains many a point that seemed, previously, obscure or difficult.