

The Coming and Day of the Lord viewed morally

2 Thess. 2: 1, 2.

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My object tonight is not so much to prove the certainty of the Lord's return as to endeavour to set forth its value, and to show how it connects itself with all that is most precious morally in God Himself, and therefore, like all other truths, bound up with Christ. I therefore shall not so much speak to souls that have never heard — or have not in some measure received — the general testimony of scripture to the coming of the Lord Jesus, as take a somewhat comprehensive glance, assuming that those who are now present have already to a certain extent made this truth their own.

One difficulty from which souls have suffered is this, that they confound two distinct parts of the Lord's coming. We have them both brought before us in the two verses just read. "We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him." Here it is scarcely possible to avoid some perception of the object of the Spirit of God in what He is applying to the brethren. He beseeches the brethren by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and their re-union with Him on high, that "ye be not soon shaken in mind." It is clear that the Holy Ghost used the presence of Christ and its effect in gathering the saints to Him as a motive of comfort and stay to their souls in the face of agitating rumours. They were therefore not to be "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 is present" (or "come").

It seems superfluous to dwell particularly on what has been often done before. I need not now stop to prove that the reading is the day of "the Lord" rather than "Christ," or that the version is not "at hand," but "present," or actually arrived. I am entitled to both points as already ruled. No doubt this may be somewhat startling to those who have not examined the subject fully, but it is now conceded by competent scholars everywhere; even the last point is generally admitted by persons who were themselves originally and strongly opposed. It is simply a question in fact, first, of the actual title that the Spirit of God wrote, and next of our giving the last word its true and regular force. No critic of weight any longer hesitates to receive κυρίου for the vulgar Χριστοῦ. The meaning of ἐνέστηκεν has been more questioned. Certain however it is that what is translated here being "at hand" never means this in scripture, if indeed it ever means so anywhere else; but it is sufficient for my purpose to say that the Spirit of God never employs it in that sense. When He means "at hand," He uses a different expression.

The report spread was that the well-known day of trouble was already come. Of course those who spread abroad such a rumour must have taken the day of the Lord in some spiritual way, because it was very evident that the world at large abode much as before, and that judgment-day in a literal sense was not as yet. There were trials, persecutions, and troubles of various kinds at that time, which were taken hold of in order to make out that the day of the Lord in some sort was already arrived. Nor is this by any means an uncommon thing in the history of souls or of Christendom. There have been several epochs before in the world when people pretended that the last day was come. And we may find something that may help you in this point of view in the second Epistle to Timothy, where we learn those were not wanting who propagated the notion that the resurrection was past already. Clearly they must have taken the resurrection in some figurative way to set up such a pretension. But, understand it as they might, their doctrine is certain. However we may explain, or try to explain, the character and grounds of the errors which the Spirit of God guards against in both passages, we must own the fact

and the plain meaning of the words. The false teachers in the one place insisted that the day of the Lord was arrived, and in the other they said that the resurrection was already past, or had actually come. The truth is that neither one nor other could be till Christ Himself had come; and this is what the Spirit of God pre-supposes more particularly in the very verse before. "We beseech you, brethren, by 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 is present." Do not believe that it is set in. Do you not know that the Lord Jesus is coming to gather you to Himself first?

Now the Thessalonian saints were feebly aware of this, not at all clear as to it. They had been lately led to expect that the day of the Lord might somehow fall with its troubles before the Lord Jesus came — the blessed object of hope for the believer. That is, they did not know the right mutual relation between the day of the Lord and the coming of the Lord. They had seen in the Old Testament, where the day of Jehovah is frequently spoken of, that a special time of disaster on any nation is called "the day of the LORD," as for instance with Egypt, or Babylon. So here it would appear from the first Epistle to the Thessalonians that the believers were going through considerable trouble; for the apostle was afraid that Satan might tempt them because of their tribulation. The enemy did take advantage of this by a misuse of the Old Testament, and false teachers pretended that the day of terror and trial, of clouds and darkness, was already come. No, says the apostle, we beseech you by the coming of our Lord Jesus, and our gathering together unto him, that ye be not troubled by anything of the sort. That day is not come.

These false teachers, it is plain from what follows, were not merely deceived; some at least were deceivers. This is certain from the fact that they pretended to have a letter written by the apostle Paul to the effect that the day of the Lord was actually come. There are, or have been, Christians who apply this to the first epistle. They are mistaken. The language will not bear a reference to that epistle. If the apostle had meant his first epistle, he would have said, "By letter from us," or "by our letter." He on the contrary speaks after another sort, "by letter *as* from us;" that is, "by letter purporting to be through us." "As from us" does not mean that it really was, but that they said it was. In short, therefore, it was not a misunderstanding of the inspired Epistle to the Thessalonians, though they may have sought to extract some support from it; but what the apostle here warns against is, that they had gone so far as to present a pretended letter from the apostle to the effect that the day of the Lord was already come.

Then in the remaining part of the chapter, from the third verse, the apostle gives them another ground against this thought. In short, he says that the day of the Lord cannot come until there is the falling away or the apostasy, and the man of sin is revealed — two great stages of evil which must be fulfilled before the day of the Lord comes. For this there is a very simple reason. The day of the Lord supposes divine judgment executed on an evil state of things on the earth. In the Old Testament we find it also in a preparatory or providential way; but the New Testament only speaks of it in its complete form, when our Lord Jesus will Himself be the executor of that judgment. Now there was the point in which these deceivers were mistaken (for very possibly they were deceived while at the same time they were deceivers): the New Testament only points to the day of the Lord in its final and full sense. The attempts, therefore, to apply the scriptures of the New Testament in a preparatory or providential way were altogether erroneous. That day could not come, he says, "except there come the falling away first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." Then he develops the dreadful character of the man of sin, and explains that the ripe and manifest evil which is to be judged when our Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in flaming fire is to be the result of what was already secretly at work. He says "the mystery of iniquity" (or lawlessness) "doth already work; only there is one who now letteth" (or

hindereth) "until he be taken out of the way, and then shall the lawless one be revealed." I prefer the word "lawlessness" instead of "iniquity" in verse 7, and "lawless one" instead of "wicked" in verse 8, because the apostle means not so much the general evil that is in the world as a very special consummation both of the principle and of the practice of lawlessness, and then of a certain lawless personage that is singled out in the scripture as the object of divine judgment at the close.

Thus it is seen we have the connection of the mystery or secret of lawlessness which was already at work with that result. It was going on when the apostle wrote; and the hidden leaven of evil, the mystery of lawlessness, will continue to work until it issues in this person, the lawless one, when it will be no longer secret but an open manifestation, defying God and trampling on all truth in the world — a complete abandonment of all revelation, and a rising up in personal pride and antagonism against the Lord Himself. This is the lawless one or the Antichrist of St. John. I do not mean antichrists, but *the* Antichrist who is spoken of as the great object of divine dealing when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven. So he says here, "Then shall that lawless one be revealed whom the Lord Jesus" — for so it is written, the word "Jesus" having dropped out of the common Bible, "whom the Lord Jesus" — "shall consume by the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness" (or rather shining forth, ἐπιφανεία) "of his coming."

Now I have read this because it makes plain a very important point for those who have not seen it before. "The coming" of the Lord Jesus is the general expression; "the day" of the Lord is a particular part of it. When the Lord is revealed in His "day," it is still His "coming;" but the Lord might come for purposes of grace before the arrival of what scripture calls His day, for this simple reason, that the day, as can be shown from various scriptures, always involves two things — manifestation and (if it be the world that is in question) judgment, which the coming of the Lord Jesus does not. The day of the Lord implies manifestation and judgment; but this is not all the Lord will do. The coming of the Lord Jesus therefore is what we may call the generic term; it is the broader and more general form of expressing the great truth; whereas the day of the Lord in the full sense is that particular phase of His presence in which He deals with what is opposed to God, and displays Him righteously before man. Thus in verse 8 it is the day, though not expressly so designated; but the shining forth of His presence is clearly judicial, as the context shows, and manifest by the force of the phrase itself, and hence means the day of the Lord. So does the presence or coming of "the Son of man," as in Matt. 24, where the phrase conjoined, being the παρουσία of the Lord as judge, modifies the sense and necessarily implies that day.

It is too often assumed that the coming of our Lord and His day are all one and the same thing; but where this is done, it is impossible to understand the proper force of scripture. Take this place, where the apostle beseeches them by the one that they be not troubled about the other. How could he beseech them by any thing that they should not be disturbed by the same thing? Where the sense or propriety of this? But we can perfectly understand that the day of the Lord is to be the time when evil must be put down, when there is beyond measure trouble and confusion among men, when solemn judgments press on and the Lord's hand is stretched out till the result is complete, that it is associated with images of human terror, and indeed with reality of divine judgment executed on the earth. The saints then are by the apostle besought, by that bright hope of Christ's presence which was full of comfort and blessedness to themselves, not to be troubled about the tremendous intervention of the Lord in His day, which was full of anxiety and trouble to those settled down in the earth.

Nor does this of course depend on a single particular scripture. I shall draw your attention to several parts of the word of God, and then show, as I trust, the immense moral principles of truth that are underneath this difference, so as to make it evident that we have no mere verbal distinction, but real

and grave truths, which flow out of God's own nature and run through His word.

Here, however, it is easy to point out in the same passage the evident difference, and even contrast, between the two things. Before leaving the passage, you will observe that the latter part of verse 8 speaks of "the brightness of his coming." It is the very same word that is rendered elsewhere "the appearing," and hence would here mean "the appearing of his coming." If His coming always implied brightness or appearing, there would be no particular point, but tautology rather, in saying "the appearing of his coming." If on the other hand the coming of the Lord does not necessarily or of itself imply manifestation, then it would require "the appearing of his coming" to define that the Lord will then be made manifest to the world. And this I believe to be the simple truth.

Hence, therefore, we might affirm that it would not be correct to say "by the appearing (or the day) of the Lord and our gathering together then." On the other hand to say, "whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with *his coming*," would scarcely be according to the exactitude of scripture. In order to give precision to the thought, the Spirit of God was pleased to say that He shall destroy him with "the appearing of his coming." This no doubt is substantially the same thing as "the day of the Lord;" that is, it is not merely His coming, but His coming made manifest; it is the coming or presence of the Son of man when every eye shall see Him. Now, if He always be manifest when He comes, where would be the reason for saying "the appearing of his coming?" but if He can come and accomplish very important objects by His presence without appearing, then we can understand that it is necessary where there is also manifestation to say so.

This, then, I believe is what we really ought to gather from the expression of the Holy Spirit here. In short, in the first verse the Spirit of God speaks of His coming without a word about the appearing. In the eighth verse He speaks about not the coming only but the appearing — the manifestation of His coming. Now observe the difference. When the coming alone is spoken of, what is the connection? What the revealed effect of His coming? "We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of the Lord Jesus and our gathering together unto him." The effect of the Lord's coming or presence (for such is the strict meaning of παρουσία), is that the saints are gathered to be with the Lord. Whether found sleeping or awake — in other words, whether alive or dead — the saints are gathered to be with Christ. "We beseech you by the coming of our Lord Jesus and our gathering unto him." The moment the Lord Jesus comes — not when He appears, but when He comes and instead of being absent is present — the saints at once are assembled to be with Him above. But the lawless one is not judged until the Lord not merely comes but appears. Therefore it is said, "whom the Lord Jesus shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the appearance of his coming." The manifested presence of the Lord is appointed and said in the word to deal with the adversary.

Hence therefore the coming of the Lord, and the appearing of His coming, or His day, are two distinct facts. He can come and receive His saints, and afterwards He will appear and put down the adversary. Perhaps the objection might be raised, and it is well to meet it at once, "But why should He not come and deal with the adversary first, and then gather the saints to Himself?" The answer is best met by the question, What saith the scripture? On such matters we can have no light but the Bible. But it would seem that this is in part the error the apostle combats. The false teachers were alarming the saints with the notion that the day of the Lord was already come. I grant you that they could only in this have meant the day in a kind of figurative way, perhaps believing that the day ultimately would be still more tremendous. Some, however, use figures to destroy realities. Otherwise if only a figurative day of the Lord filled them with trouble, surely the final day of the Lord would be still more tremendous if it could happen without their being gathered to the Lord first. Certain it is that by their sense of "the day of the Lord" before His presence to gather them to be with Him, they were shaken in mind and

troubled: how much more if they had looked for that day in all its force with the saints left on the earth when the Lord will crush this kingdom and humble that, destroying the beast, the false prophet, as well as households, with his saints mixed up in so fearful a hurly-burly of this world! I need not say how unlike all this would be to the ways of the Lord with those whom He loves.

But we do not need to come to mere inferences. To tell you the truth, I always distrust any doctrine on any subject that depends on mere illative reasoning. If you cannot give me scripture for what you say, do not say it; and I would advise you, if I may so do, to beware of it yourselves. How can anything be of faith that is merely inferential or a development? You ought to have scripture; and these are times when we cannot afford to have anything less than the plain word of God. God, who is ever considerate of the simple, and graciously thinks of the wants of souls that do not know much, does give His revealed mind for whatever is to be believed, and therefore it is not a mere theory we want — a consequence drawn from something else — perhaps a theory built upon theory. Nothing of the sort is here, but the plain word of God for the believer.

In another Epistle the apostle lays it down as a doctrine bound up with most important consequences, that "when Christ who is our life shall appear, we shall appear with him in glory." This is the more important as he is contrasting two different states of Christ. He says that "our life is hid with Christ in God." Christ is now hidden. So long as He is thus, our life too is hidden. "When Christ who is our life shall appear," in contrast with being hidden, "then we shall also appear." If you give this full force, it would be thus: "When Christ who is our life shall be manifested" (which is really the full and proper word), "then shall we also" (then, not before, and not after, but at that time) "be manifested with him in glory." It is seen at once that the moment of the Lord's appearing is the moment of the church's appearing along with Him. The Lord, therefore, cannot appear a second before the glorified saints appear along with Him. When the Lord is manifested, the saints are so also, being already with Him. And this entirely agrees with the plain statement of symbolic scripture, where we have the times and the seasons more fully than anywhere else in the New Testament. If there is any book in the apostolic writings where we should expect to have prophetic measures, it is certainly in the Revelation. Now in that chain of predictions — the most important book of prophecy for the Christian — the day of the Lord of course has its place. We find the full statement of the Lord's appearing from heaven in judgment. It is given in detail in Revelation 19. "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire," and so on. In verse 14 we read, "And the armies which were in the heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean." Now there it is most evident that when the heavens open for the appearing in glory, they open not merely for Christ, but for those that are Christ's. "The armies which were in heaven" (the heavenly saints are no longer on the earth) "followed him on white horses clothed in fine linen, white and clean." I grant you that this retinue and dress might be supposed to be angelic; and it is not denied that angels follow the Lord. But it is plain that those who are described here are not angels, for this simple reason, that they are said to be "clothed in fine linen, white and clean;" and in the very same chapter (verse 8) the fine linen is said to be "the righteousness of saints" — not of angels. We know nothing at all about the righteousness of angels. They are never in the Bible spoken of as righteous. They are without sin, being sustained as in their original integrity and purity; but this is not the meaning of righteousness.

Consistency with our relationship is ever spoken of, as far as the creature is concerned, as either conferred by the Lord Jesus Christ, or as the fruit of the Holy Spirit's practical action in the soul. Righteousness therefore may be either that which we are accounted in Christ — what is commonly called imputed righteousness — when by faith the believer though unrighteous in himself is accounted

righteous in the Lord, which is perfectly true, and a very important truth; or, on the other hand, it is that which the Spirit of God exercises us in practically day by day. I have not the slightest doubt that in this case the reference is to the latter. "The fine linen is the righteousness of saints." For this reason the word really means here "righteousnesses." It is a different form of word, and plural. If it were a question of what we are made in Christ, neither would be the case. The righteousness which we are made in Christ is the same righteousness for every one that is made it. As in sin, so in righteousness — there is "no difference." Here John is speaking about the righteousnesses of each saint, and the more as we find the saints spoken of as a whole. "Righteousnesses" is a phrase impossible to apply to what we are made in Christ; because, if this were the case, the result would be, one made one measure and another made another measure, which would be inconsistent with the revealed doctrine of divine righteousness. But when we come to look at the practical display of righteousness, of course there are differences. The exact meaning of the word is "righteousnesses of the saints," as in any accurate translation by such as profess to give the precise sense you will find it to be what I am here stating; for we are not now entering on disputed points. There are proper seasons for discussing delicate shades of meaning; but I am speaking now of what is commonly allowed by all fair enquirers, whatever their system may be.

This then seems a very decisive scripture. For thus the Lord Jesus, followed by the risen saints, comes from heaven for the execution of judgment on earth. It is the day of the Lord, the brightness or appearing of His coming when He destroys the lawless one. But when He so comes He is not alone. Others beyond angels are with Him — faithful, called, and chosen. (Rev. 17: 14.) He is followed by the armies that are in heaven. Of course these saintly hosts must have been caught up there before. The scene does not suit the separate spirits of the saints. They are never so described. They would not be seen mounted on white horses any more than on thrones: both, I grant, symbols of course; but not of saints in the separate state. They are saints already glorified. In short therefore we learn another fact — not only that the Lord Jesus comes and receives the saints, but that He takes them up to heaven; so that when the wickedness of the world completely develops, which may follow the translation in a very short time, then the heaven opens, and the Lord comes with the glorified saints attending Him. Any one who is acquainted with the structure of the book of Revelation will see that what I am now stating is only a reproduction of what the Spirit of God clearly reveals there.

For, only to say a few words more, what is it we find in the book? I should say this. First of all are the seven churches, — a complete view of the church state. After this we have churches no more. When the last of these Apocalyptic assemblies has been brought before us — the seven churches of Asia, though as I believe looking out prophetically — there is not a word more about churches on the earth. The true way of accounting for the fact so pictured here is, that the Lord comes and takes away those who are now in a church condition, waiting for Him according to His promise. For how is that state to close otherwise? It was not man that began the church at Pentecost, it was God; and He only will put an end to that condition; and this He will do by receiving to the Lord Jesus those that belong to Him, and are waiting for Him. Accordingly heaven is opened immediately after, or at any rate a door is opened in heaven, and the prophet sees a body never before seen in heaven — the twenty-four elders. Angels had been seen, seraphim and cherubim, the Son of man, and even the Ancient of days; but who had ever heard of elders in heaven before? How came they there? They were the saints caught up to be with the Lord. He had taken them to Himself on high. And this is entirely confirmed by the fact, that the elders are seen to be crowned and throned. As they are invested with royal dignity, they further have vials full of odours or incense. Thus they are both kings and priests. There can be no doubt therefore that these elders are not angels but glorified saints. For there is another thing to take notice of; that is, they are complete, they are twenty-four. Now that number most evidently answers to the

courses of priesthood — the only twenty-four that I am aware of which is given in scripture. They are the heads of the priesthood; for afterwards we know there were others made priests, but there were no more heads of the priesthood. They were the chief priests, so to speak, of the heavenly hierarchy. These are no other, in my judgment, than the Old Testament and the New Testament saints caught up at the coming of the Lord Jesus to be with Himself. Afterwards others are seen in the vision put to death, martyrs at the end of the age during the time of unparalleled trouble, who become not elders but priests, not chiefs, if one may so speak, but simply priests. How blessed to be so! Yet they do not arrive at the dignity of the twenty-four. Thus the elders have a very special place; and accordingly there is never an addition to their number. Others may be called and blessed; but the elders remain twenty-four as before from beginning to end. It confirms this to see that from chap. 19, to which I have already referred, we do not hear a word more about the elders. They disappear. Why? Because the Lord Jesus will have come from heaven, whither He will have taken them up, and when afterwards spoken of, it is as His armies or hosts. Then comes the question of making war on a guilty world. Elders do not make war; but hosts do. Consequently the figure of the elders is dropped, and that of armies is taken up. There can be no solution, it appears to me, of the case other than this — at least I am not aware of any other that has even an appearance of meeting the conditions of the problem.

Further, all this is precisely in accordance with what we have seen to be the doctrine of the Apostle Paul. He urges on the saints to be always expecting the coming of the Lord. He teaches them that, while the Lord is hidden, they too must be; that when the Lord is manifested, they shall be manifested along with Him in glory. Consequently the coming of the Lord cannot at first be manifest, because if the Lord Jesus appeared when He came to receive the saints, He would appear in heaven and they would be still on the earth: He would be appearing in glory without the saints; whereas the doctrine of scripture is that when the Lord shall be manifested, they shall be manifested along with Him in glory. (Col. 3: 4.)

Thus, putting together what we have seen, nothing can be more simple. He will come again. Instead of being absent, He comes and the saints at once rise to meet Him in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. He takes them to heaven, to the presence of the Father. Afterwards the right moment comes for the Lord Jesus to appear; and when He appears, they appear along with Him in glory. Thus you see these various statements of scripture perfectly harmonize when the two different steps or stages of the Lord's coming are understood; whereas when they are not taken account of, many and serious difficulties rise up; one part of the word does not agree with another, which is always the effect wherever we have not before us the full and simple truth of God. Whenever you have only part of the truth, still more if you accredit a mistake, there is some other portion that will not agree. When you have received the truth in simplicity, then the different parts which seemed disconnected and opposed all fall into their proper places. When it is seen accordingly that the coming of the Lord first is brought before us gathering the saints to be with Him, and then that He not only comes but appears in glory, and the saints follow Him out of heaven and appear in glory too, all is made plain.

Further, the interval between the coming of the Lord and the appearing of His coming is the time that Satan busily employs to bring forward his great plot of the apostasy and the man of sin. It is the time when the mystery of lawlessness ceases to be a mystery, when the lawlessness that was working secretly issues up into its full development and the lawless one shall be revealed; and the revolt is so direct and complete that God, as it were, acts on the impossibility of tolerating it more. The Lord Jesus, therefore, as the Word of God then as ever, comes forth and judges this excessive and destructive rebellion against God where men boast most here below. But then His own glorified saints are with Him; and this, it will be seen, puts the whole case in a clear light as to the scriptures. Nor is this the

only result. There is another remark or two to be made which will be found of importance.

We know that in God Himself there are two qualities that especially display themselves in dealing with His people. The first is His grace, the second His righteousness. In the cross of Christ the grace of God and the righteousness of God meet in perfect concord and join in the blessing of the believer. So in our daily walk with God, who does not find that His grace brings us into a certain position of blessing where, if we fail, the Lord has a righteous government in which He chastises us? This is the reason why you may find such an one so much more troubled, so much more in sorrow, affliction, and humiliation, because he is a child of God, if he have failed as a servant of God and grieved the Spirit. The Lord does not abandon His love — His grace abides, as does its fruit also. Grace has brought that soul to God out of the world. Does God repent of His grace because the soul needs to repent, as having fallen into what is evil, grievous, and humbling? Not so. Does God then say, As he is my child, I pass all over? No, He never passes over the faults of the Christian. There is where we learn the faithful yet holy provision of His love. His grace shall never be given up. On the other hand, His righteous government must always take its way. Hence it was with the Corinthians, who really were believers, as the apostle was told when he went to the city — that city of corruption and vileness. The Lord had much people there; though if there was a spot in the world where the holy apostle might have been afraid to put his foot and to live, it was Corinth. It was notoriously the vilest of the vile. But the Lord had much people there. At Athens He had comparatively few people. But at Corinth the apostle had learnt what he could not have gathered otherwise, and therefore went on; and even when many of them went sadly astray, falling into grievous disorder and sin, he did not give up his confidence that the Lord owned them as His people. But he told them, and told them in the most solemn manner, that if they did not judge themselves, they would be judged of the Lord; and that, when they were judged, they were chastened of Him that they should not be condemned with the world. For with the Lord sin must be judged; sin can never be tolerated where He is named. If we, therefore, through carelessness allow sin, one of two things is evident. If we have no portion in Christ, we must ourselves be judged for it everlastingly; and, if so, how can we be but lost? But if the grace of God has really brought us to Himself by Jesus Christ our Lord, He deals with us, sends affliction on us, and perhaps even takes away natural life (1 John 5), that we should not be condemned with the world. Thus the righteous government of God must take its course and do its work; and this no less in mercy to us than in vindication of His own glory.

As this is true even in our ordinary walk, as these two principles are most clearly united in the cross, are they absent from the coming of the Lord? Not so. Grace or righteousness is always found. How then can they be applied to the future according to God? As the coming of the Lord consists of the two parts already distinguished, it will be found on examination that, where scripture simply speaks of the coming of the Lord as such without any reference to manifestation or judgment, it is invariably the answer to the grace of God. And this may be seen readily by the simplest believer. For, let me ask, why does the Lord Jesus come again? and why are the saints gathered up to be with Him above? Because of His absolute grace. If it were not for grace, do you suppose that the Lord Jesus would leave the glory of heaven and the presence of His Father? Certainly not. And if the Lord Jesus could leave that glory to come, how could He gather up such as you and me to be with Him at once? How could we be taken into the presence of God in light and blessedness, in peace and joy and rest for ever? From no other principle than His grace. It is grace and nothing but grace that can adequately account for the coming of the Lord for us and our gathering to be with Him. Therefore we understand that this is the richest and fullest motive of comfort that the apostle Paul could bring to bear on the souls of the saints to dispel the injurious notions which the instruments of Satan were spreading.

For let me explain further, that there are two ways, in one or other of which you will find heterodoxy to indulge, and you may know teachers to be false by their indulgence in them. One of these ways of error is the effort to give a spurious, groundless comfort to those who rather need warning and conviction. The other feature of false doctrine is, that it seeks to rob of comfort those whom God fills with peace and joy in believing. In short, false teachers either strive to comfort those that are of the world as such while they still remain worldly, and are really unbelievers and unquickened by the Spirit of God; or, on the other hand, they endeavour to alarm and shake the confidence of those that have unfeigned faith in the Lord Jesus. It is for you to make the application; but to you it will soon appear, unless I am greatly mistaken, and the more it is examined with the fuller evidence, that into one or other of these two ditches false teachers habitually fall. Thus there never is the distinctness of revealed truth; there never is the sense of the authority of the Lord over the soul; there is never confidence in God for eternal life. Uncertainty Godward there is, and this on principle, which makes it so mischievous. There is the endeavour that, on the one hand, the believer should not be confident, happy, or thoroughly at rest in the Lord, which is surely of the devil. On the other hand, there is the endeavour that the worldly person should not be too much cast down, or really alarmed about his soul. "We must have charity. You do not know but that the Lord is dealing with that soul. Perhaps, after all, he may be a Christian: how can you tell? Be not presumptuous in believing yourself or in doubting him." Now all such thoughts flow from the same kind of deceivers as the apostle Paul was dealing with in his day; and the truth of God is clean contrary to the ways of the enemy in both respects.

Applying this to the present subject, we think of the believers at Thessalonica: What was the way of the Holy Ghost with them? To keep their minds bright, fervent, and happy in the constant expectation of the Lord Jesus. You cannot be too happy in Christ; you cannot too much confide in the truth and grace of God. You may be too confident in yourself; and there is the great and frequent mistake. You may be careless in your ways, but this you do not owe to Jesus. On the contrary, because you are a Christian, your heart should be exercised every day, whether you are growing in the Lord, whether you are advancing in the knowledge of Him, whether you are serving and glorifying Him according to what you know to-day, not excusing failure according to what was not known yesterday. We must not allow ignorance in the past to hinder us in the present. Our responsibility is always according to what the Lord has shown in our souls now. These Thessalonian believers then were assailed by false teachers whose great object was to take them away from their stable ground of comfort and rest in the grace of God, and to fill them with alarm because of the terrible day of trouble and judgment that is coming upon the earth, insisting that in some sort or measure it had already begun. "Not at all," says the apostle Paul, "you hold fast your bright hope. Do you not know that the Lord Jesus is coming Himself for you, and that then you are going to be gathered up to Him? Do not be troubled by all this talk about the day of the Lord. You are going to be with Christ. Granted that His day is to come; but it cannot come till the worst evil is fully ripe." The object of the day of the Lord is not the saints at all, but to judge the evil that is in the world, the lawlessness which is already at work secretly, and which is going to issue in the most open and appalling opposition to God. When that development has reached its height, then the day of the Lord will come upon it, the brightness or appearing of His coming.

Thus we see how this at once restores the balance of truth. The "coming" of the Lord Jesus is the display of perfect grace. The "day" of the Lord is the execution of righteousness; it is the dealing of the Lord with what is contrary to Himself. And I add, further, it is not merely that the world will be the object of righteous dealing, but even the saints themselves; and for this reason: not that they will be judged like the world — if they were, they must be lost too; but the Lord gives scope for His righteous

ways, while at the same time He does not mix up the believer and the unbeliever in judgment. The believer shall not come into judgment. It is not merely that he shall not come into condemnation, but that he does not come into judgment, such is the express teaching of the Lord Jesus in John 5. How then does the Lord reconcile all this? Perfectly. When the believers are caught up to be with Christ, they will be manifested before His judgment seat; they will give to the Lord an account of everything done by the body. The Lord accordingly will vindicate His own ways with them, and they will appreciate all His dealings as perfectly as they will judge their own. Hence, therefore, when the Lord Jesus appears in glory, the saints that are already with Him — the glorified saints — will be displayed according to either their service rendered or their faithfulness under trial. There will be different positions in glory. And on what does difference of position depend? Upon the grace of God? Not so. If it were the grace of God, all would be in the same position. It is nothing but the absolute grace of God that could save a single soul; it is precisely the same grace of God that saves you and the apostle. There is no difference. If there could be a shade of difference in the grace, you could not get to heaven at all. The fact is there is only One who could bring you there, and that is Christ; but even Christ Himself — with reverence be it spoken — even the Saviour could not bring you there worthily of God, except by redemption. It is not the spotlessness and the perfectness of Christ — it is not Christ even perfect in all His ways here below — that brings you to heaven, though you cannot get there without all; but it is Christ suffering for you, "the just for the unjust," that brings you to God; and He suffered in the fullest way for every soul that is brought to God. In fact, it is the very same suffering of Christ on the cross that is applied to every soul that needs it.

Thus, then, we see that it is precisely the same grace displayed in and by the Lord Jesus Christ, and that it is only by His suffering as the crucified Christ that souls are brought to God. But when brought to God, then the Lord takes account of every difference. Certainly neither you nor I will have the same place in glory as the apostle Paul. For Christians in general have a sort of feeling — some may be a little more confused than others, but generally they have a just feeling — that there will be differences: only sometimes they confound things together, and often do not well distinguish between the grace that brings to God and His righteous government that arranges among those brought to God according to a just estimate of their service and suffering.

Hence, too, it is that failure will appear then. I do not at all mean by this that any one in the presence of God will not be thoroughly happy. I am persuaded that in heaven, and in the kingdom too, there will be perfect happiness for every soul that is brought to God; only the Lord will know how to reconcile the two things. The Lord will know how to maintain every glorified one in perfect enjoyment of Him, and at the same time to display each according to his faithfulness or his lack of it. All this, doubtless, will be ordered according to the unfailing righteousness of the Lord in the kingdom; only we must remember that we shall feel them perfectly according to God. We shall delight in another's having a better place than ourselves. There will be no envy, nor jealousy whatever. All will thoroughly overflow with divine joy, and each bow in submission, delighting in it, to the will of the Lord.

This seems to connect itself very manifestly with the great subject of which I am treating. All goes to show that the difference between the coming of the Lord and the day of the Lord is not in the least arbitrary, but necessary if our future is to reflect the ways and nature of God. Who can say that it merely depends on a text here or a word there, though this would be quite enough for a believing soul that knows no more? Nor do I put the smallest slight on the man — on the contrary, I admire him — who, though he does not understand why it is, cleaves simply to scripture. This is quite right. Every one has not the same spiritual intelligence. Few can clearly explain why things are as they are in scripture: to do so supposes a certain spiritual maturity. But understanding or not understanding, hold fast what

God reveals. Nevertheless it is no small comfort to the heart when, having received truth as a simple matter of faith, we have a spiritual understanding of it given to us by the Spirit of God.

I trust that what has been advanced will help souls in this way; indeed I am persuaded of it. They will see that the coming of the Lord, when it is named simply as such, is always associated with the display of grace, and that the day of the Lord is always associated with the display of righteousness. A few scriptures may serve to make this plain.

Let me take you first of all to the first Gospel, and we shall find there somewhat that bears on the subject. In Matthew 25 we have the parable of what is called "The Ten Virgins;" and there we are told that they took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. "And at midnight," while the bridegroom tarried, and they had all slumbered and slept, "there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps." The foolish wanted oil: the wise had no oil to give them as they said, "lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage." And what is its character morally? Is it the display of righteousness? Certainly not, but of grace. Thus it is no question at all of faithfulness being manifested to the world; it is merely the intimate privilege of being with the Bridegroom. It is not the virgins appearing with Him; for they are not so shown. It is an inner scene. They go forth to meet the Bridegroom; the Bridegroom comes; and they go in with Him to the marriage.

It may interest some to know that the parable really closes with the words, "Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour." The words "*wherein the Son of man cometh*" are an unauthorized addition to the parable. The words were no doubt put in because they occurred elsewhere in the discourse; but it is perfectly well known to those acquainted with these matters that the clause has no sufficient title to be there. Be it noted that there is not a word about the Son of man in the parable unless there. A spiritual mind would see that "Son of man" does not agree with the tone of the parable. The Lord is presented not as Son of man, in which capacity judgment is given to Him, but as Bridegroom. What has a bridegroom to do with judgment? It is plain that the whole scope of the passage is a certain scene of joy and blessedness into which the Lord will introduce those that wait for Him. He has called them from this world to wait for Himself; but while He tarries all prove unfaithful. The Lord, however, in His love causes a warning to go forth in time to them all; but those that had not the oil of the Spirit, the unction from the Holy One, lost themselves in vainly seeking it, and in fact were shut out. Those who had the unction were ready, and went in to the marriage. It is clearly Christians as distinct from those who were merely nominal professors; for if they had been true believers, they would not have wanted the oil. Can we rightly think of a Christian that has not the Holy Ghost? Is it not the distinctive privilege of all such? It might be needless to say so, but for those who have speculated about it, and argued that the foolish ones must have had oil. Why reason thus? The scripture says, not that they had a little oil, but that they had none. The teaching is perfectly plain, and it is only when men have a troublesome theory of their own that they find these difficulties. But you say that their lamps had been burning. True, the wick burned a little while, but it did not burn long without oil. There is really no difficulty if we believe what the Lord says, that they took no oil. Thus, taking the oil as always in the language of scripture for the Spirit, they had not the Spirit. "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

But in the connection we have another view. Take the very next parable, where we have the different servants who are weighed and approved by the Lord Jesus according to their success or not in trading with the talents given them. There we find government, righteous government, taking account

of the differences among them. Accordingly we find that one has made two talents, and another five. Differences are found here, no difference on the part of the virgins. All five wise virgins, all those that had oil, go in one as much as another. There was no difference among them: when you are on the ground of grace, difference is not the point; but when you enter that of righteous government, difference instantly appears. Then, we readily observe, there are differences not only between the faithful as compared with the unfaithful, but between the faithful as compared with one another. Thus scripture is perfectly harmonious.

Without wishing to notice every passage, let us look at the Gospel of Luke. In Luke 12: 35 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. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." What is this? Righteous government? Not in the least. It is grace and nothing else. The Lord come forth and serve us! Have we any claim to this? We! Certainly not. It is a deeper blessedness, even that of such as we, to have the Lord the Son of God serving them in the fulness of His grace. "Blessed are those servants, then, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching."

But let us look a little farther on in the chapter at the reply of our Lord to Peter, who asked, "Speakest thou this parable to us, or even unto all? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom the lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom the lord when he cometh shall find so doing." The moment you come to our "doing," you involve righteous government, which estimates conduct displayed in practical facts. Of course differences are seen there; and there the lord makes the faithful servant ruler over his household. He gives one a position of rule here, another of rule there, and these are not the same; as we find in chapter 19 of the same Gospel, one is made a ruler over five cities, another is made a ruler over ten cities, speaking now parabolically, according to the language of the Lord.

Thus the first is the ground of grace, the effect of which is that you are found watching for Christ. Here it is not what you are to be; it is Christ Himself that fills the heart. You love Him, and therefore watch for Him. You do not even consider what position you are going to be placed in, which is another thought altogether, when every man receives according to his work. Here it is simply the heart fixed on an object that is dearer to it than all others, the effect of which is that you watch for Him; you delight in the Lord Jesus; and "blessed are those servants whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching." For then is the fulness of His own grace: He comes forth and serves them, as we have seen.

But if I am found faithfully doing whatever the Lord calls me to here, this is not forgotten. If you are a faithful servant, the Lord will make you an honoured ruler. If you have been faithful in a little, He will exalt you over much. Such is the order given, and such the manner of His dealing with us. But it is clear that here we are come to righteous government.

Thus we see then that these principles run through scripture, that it is not a capricious theory which first supposes a thing and then endeavours to squeeze other things into fit. Here we have what God Himself has written; here we have what does not depend on a mere word or two, but what is firmly rooted in the truth of scripture and in the moral principles of God Himself.

We come now to another scripture, to the Gospel of John. What do we find there? Righteous government? Not at all. It is not so that the coming of the Lord is ever presented — as far as I know, never — in his Gospel "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God; believe also in me. In my

Father's house are many mansions." What has this to do with righteous government? What claim have I to be in the Father's house? None but what grace has given me. I have never done anything, I have never deserved anything, which would give me even the smallest plea why the Father should put me in the same house with the Son. How is it then that any could be brought into such unspeakable nearness and intimacy with the Father? Simply because of His own grace. "In my Father's house," says our blessed Lord, "there are many mansions." He would not have us think that all the scene of goodness was for Him alone. "In my Father's house are many mansions." There is room for us as well as for Christ. "If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself." It is not to make us rulers: there is no allusion to government or its awards here. It is purely the heavenly ground of divine grace, where all other considerations vanish.

No doubt when the saints come forth from the Father's house, and are brought before the world, then comes the question of showing how they have acted and laboured, how they have endured for His sake from a Christ-rejecting world. And the Lord Jesus will put down the thoughts of the world, and will vindicate what was of Himself in His own that suffered here below; for if we suffer, we shall reign; and if we have served Him, every man will have reward according as his own work is, as the apostle Paul teaches.

But the Father's house where Christ takes us raises no question of service, nor is there the reward of suffering here. There is not a question of anything but the grace of God shown us by and with His Son. There was only One in the universe that had a right to be there, and this was the Son of God; but sovereign grace shares the place of Christ with those that deserve nothing but hell. Thus therefore what we find here is the fulness of the grace of the Son of God that will bring us into the self-same place that He enjoys Himself. This can be no other than simply grace. I am not aware that the coming of the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of John is ever connected with righteous government. Hence we never find here anything about the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven. We never find here His sending forth His angels to purge His kingdom. In the Apocalypse we do, because there we again enter the arena of righteous government. "Behold he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." But here is nothing of the kind; His word is, "Let not your heart be troubled." On the earth *their* hearts will be troubled indeed. Thus the difference between the Gospel and the Revelation is complete.

We come now to a few scriptures in the epistles, in which I shall show that the difference is one that runs through the word of God. In the Epistle to the Romans — just to take the first that comes to hand — "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." (Rom. 13: 12) We see that the day is for the decision and reward of righteous conduct. Those that look for that day are to walk suitably to it now, so that the ground of righteousness is maintained in the exhortation quite in consonance with the day that is brought before us.

Again, in 1 Corinthians 1: 6, 7 we read, "Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." "Ah!" I can conceive some one saying, "there you see it is His coming." And I grant you, if it were the "coming," it would be a great difficulty; but it is not. Looking at your margin you will find it is "the revelation of our Lord." What a remarkable instance of the perfect accuracy of scripture! Further it shows that the excellent men who made our version were loose as to the Lord's coming, and never departed from it without impairing the word of God. I say, then, that the text is wrong, the margin right, and this without the smallest doubt on the matter. If it were the *coming* of the Lord Jesus, it would be a question of

grace, which would not suit the context. But we observe that he is speaking here of their being faithful in the use of their gifts, which they were certainly far from. Hence the words are, "Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," — corrected in the margin, as it should be, to "the *revelation* of our Lord Jesus Christ." Such is the real meaning of the term. It is never translated "coming," except here. It is always translated "revelation" elsewhere. There can be no doubt therefore what it ought to be. And mark what confirms it in the next verse: "Who shall confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Now "the day," "the revelation," "the appearing," are all of a kindred character. They are distinguished from "the coming." Where it is simply the coming, I repeat, it is regularly the action of grace. Where it is the day, or the Lord's revelation, or the appearing of the Lord, it always brings in the ground of righteousness, and not simply of grace. Here it is plain that it is a question of faithful conduct, and accordingly "the day" and "revelation" are the true words, and not His presence or coming.

And so again in the other parts of this same epistle you will find the same principle. Thus in 1 Cor. 15: 23 it is said, "Every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's." When? In His day? Not at all. "At his coming." Why? It is the resurrection, which is not at all a question of righteousness, and could not be a reward for faithful conduct. We are not to be raised from the dead because we have been good servants, but because we are Christ's. It is pure grace that gives us such a portion with Him. We in no way deserve it. Hence, therefore, when it is a question of the display of grace towards us, it is the coming of the Lord — "they that are Christ's at his coming."

On the other hand, where the day is spoken of, as for instance in the Epistle to the Philippians, we shall find that faithful conduct or endurance is always before the mind of the Spirit of God. He says there, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it (or carry it on) until the day of Jesus Christ: even as it is meet for me to think this of you all." (Phil. 1: 6) So afterwards in verse 10, "That ye may be sincere and without offence, till the *day* of Christ;" again, in the next chapter (Phil. 2: 16) he says, "Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain." It is a question of faithful service. The day, we see, is connected with the display of how far an apostle or any other has been faithfully serving the Lord. The coming of the Lord will not do this. The effect of it is not to display us before the world, but to take us clean out to be with Christ. When the Lord returns and appears before the world, then He will display how far we have been faithful. The day therefore is bound up with the display of faithfulness. The coming of the Lord is the taking us out of the world to be with the Lord Jesus before His Father in undeserved and infinite grace.

Nothing therefore can be more distinct, as it appears to me, than the moral truth in this matter. Hence if we examine the pastoral Epistles to Timothy and Titus, we shall find exactly the same thing. There the apostle exhorts his faithful fellow-labourer, and tells him: "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, till" — the *coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ? No; but "the *appearing* of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Tim. 6: 13, 14) For the coming of our Lord will not prove how far Timothy has been faithful or not; His appearing will do so thoroughly. The appearing of the Lord Jesus therefore is the right and proper word, and none other. Still more plainly do we see in 2 Timothy the connection between the responsibility of the servant with the Lord's appearing. Thus the apostle charges in 2 Tim. 4: 1, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom, closing this part of his exhortation with his own service and its results: "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 that love his appearing." (2 Tim. 4: 8) Comment here is needless, once the principle is stated and understood. The coming of the Lord as such to receive His own would be out of place in this connection.

So again we shall find His day in the Epistle to Titus. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." (Titus 2: 11-13) Now there it would seem that both are introduced. I think it is not merely the one but the other, the "blessed hope" being more particularly the accomplishment of our joy in being caught up to be with Christ, and the "appearing of the glory" being our manifestation before the world. This therefore is a remarkably full and rich scripture, if, as I suppose, it embraces both these truths.

Again, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, we have the day spoken of in view of responsibility. The Epistle of James presents the coming of the Lord in a rather general way. This we have seen is thoroughly correct. It is when the special side of responsibility and its results are pressed that we need and find "the day," "appearing," or some equivalent phrase for that side of the truth; as here "the judge standeth before the door."

Again 1 Peter 1: 7, 13, as well as 1 Peter 5: 4, falls under the usual rule: the manifestation of Christ connects itself with the exhibition of fidelity in trial, and service general or special. And 2 Peter 3 seems to my mind as exquisitely exact as any other, though to a superficial glance the terms might seem there interchangeable. But it is not so. The scoffers of the last days say, Where is the promise of His coming? Unbelief is as sure of a stable unchanged world as of man's progress. What is the answer of faith? Not the presence of the Lord but His *day* will come as a thief in the night. If they taunt as to the Lord's coming with its bright hope, the Holy Spirit threatens them with the solemn affirmation that His day will come with a power which will dissolve, not merely the works of busy man, but the heavens and earth before it closes.

It is obvious that, in 1 John 2: 28, 1 John 3: 2, 3, the appearing or manifestation of the Lord is intended to deal with conscience.

Jude 14, again, is no more an exception than 1 Thess. 3: 13; for His coming *with* His saints, or His presence *with* all His saints, is not His presence when He comes to receive them, but really coalesces with His manifestation or day, and hence links itself with their responsibility rather than with His pure and simple grace toward them.

But we need not now dwell more on this subject. What has been shown will set out, I trust, plainly and distinctly, and without too much heaping one scripture on another, the two lines of divine truth that meet in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, each having its own proper sphere and moral aim. The coming or the presence of the Lord is His grace towards us when it will have its full way. The same Jesus that died for us will come again and receive us unto Himself. He that is the object of our faith is no less of our hope. If He was the only One we could trust our souls to, He is the One that God would have us to be always expecting. It is due to Him: He deserves it at our hands; and our God would make none other than Christ Himself the proper, the worthy, the only, object of hope. But the same blessed Lord Jesus will take notice of all our works. There is no suffering for Him now which will not be remembered then. There is no service now that will not all be set in the light then. The day of the Lord Jesus, the day of Christ, will display the saints according to His own divine judgment of our ways.

Thus all the truth assuredly harmonizes in this great theme, and we see this when we see the two

sides in their distinctness and their combination.

May our gracious God bless His own truth to His own children for Jesus' sake!