

The Church of God in Relation to the Coming of the Lord

Titus 2: 11-14.

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Lecture 4 of 'The Second Coming and Kingdom of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

On a previous occasion we have seen the primary place which Israel had in the earthly purposes of God. Upon their land the eyes of Jehovah rested continually. Although for a season, to outward appearance, Israel lost their place, and the land itself has been the scene of continual devastation and of Gentile triumph over the ancient people of God, yet God Himself has never surrendered His plan — has only postponed that firm and first intention of His, as far as the earth is concerned. For all hope for the world, every approach to universal blessing upon the Gentiles, is bound up, not only with the restoration of Israel to their own land, but with their conversion to God in that land.

In explaining the subject of the Jews and the Gentiles, it has been already pointed out that there is an immense gap to all appearance, and indeed, in reality, in the ways of God — a gap which God's word had left room for and predicted. During that interruption for the time being of the original plan of government, there has been a most important application of other truths, and a bringing to light of another system entirely distinct from the normal idea of Israel as the centre of the nations for the earth. While God refuses to recognize the Jews as His people, He has transferred earthly power and authority to the great Gentile monarchies. This will have consequences of very deep interest; for, when the Lord comes and takes up the governmental plans which had come to nought for the present, wholly frustrated by the unfaithfulness of both Jew and Gentile, God will hand over, if I may so say, these broken tables to His Son, who will make good at His coming and reign, first Israel, or rather Himself as their King, the true Messiah of Israel, the spring and channel of blessing throughout the chosen people of God, who will then be fitted by grace for it, and so cause the stream of blessing to flow around among all nations; but, besides this, He will accomplish in His own person the other and larger glory, which answers to the exalted head of the Gentile world. Thus the two streams of blessing will flow peacefully around the Lord Jesus, the centre as it were of two concentric circles which will then expand to His glory, and fill the world with divine blessing. He is the *Son of David* for the smaller circle, and the lower of the two; He is the *Son of Man* for the larger, all-embracing government, which will then be established under the whole heaven, and not only over the land of Judea. The rule of the heavens in His person will enfold all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues, and so ensure righteousness and peace throughout all the earth.

We have now before us another theme of still more surpassing interest, especially to those who know themselves the members of the body of Christ. It will be my business to show that as there is something yet more terrible than the Gentiles' abuse of earthly power, which at the destined moment God will judge and replace by the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven to establish His own universal kingdom, so there is a blessing incomparably higher than, and entirely distinct from, anything connected either with Jew or Gentile. For disclosing this secret God in His wisdom selected that moment when the ruin of man and the world was evidently complete. It was not only the Jew rebellious and idolatrous, and the Gentile presumptuously and profanely denying the source of all his power; but when Jesus was in this world, when not merely law, the measure of human duty towards God, but the fulness of divine grace and truth came in the person of Jesus, the only begotten Son of the Father. And when the perfect divine goodness manifested in Him was hated of man, and drew out his fierce and increasing opposition even unto death, the death of the cross, then it was that God was pleased to bring

a new thing to light. It was no longer that which was connected with the earth, not even His own appearing from the heaven to control and govern the earth; but He that ascended, rejected of the earth, into the heavens, went there as no private but public person, on the ground of redemption now accomplished. He "by [or in virtue of] His own blood" entered into heaven. That blood, or rather the person of Him who shed it upon the cross and rose again, became the foundation of the Church of God. It was a work done on earth, but in itself and in its results infinite. It was a work which brought out the depth of what God is in holy grace to sinful man, the basis of His righteousness in justifying the believer. But more than this: God raised Christ from the dead, and set Him, not upon some earthly throne, nor even on a heavenly throne in connection with the earth, but at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principalities and powers, as "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead."

This was entirely unprecedented. When had been seen anything even remotely resembling it before? Mercy was no new thing; promises were not new, still less the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world for those blessed of the Father. None of these things was a mystery. On the contrary, God showed mercy to fallen Adam and his sons, gave promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prepared a kingdom, as we know, for the faithful of the nations, not to speak of His dealings with Israel; but when had He a *man* exalted above all in heaven? When One who entered there with a perfectly efficacious sacrifice, and in risen life before Himself, as the head of a new system, head of a body on earth? Up to that time there had been nothing of the kind. So far from it, that we are expressly told in the word of God it is a "mystery," or secret (for this is the meaning of the word), which God hid, not in the Bible, but in Himself — a secret only now divulged to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. Types or shadows there might be, which, when this secret was made manifest, were found to receive an answer in certain of its parts or elements. But, as a whole, it was an absolutely new thing, never made known either by man or to man, till the Lord Jesus Christ went up into heaven and sent down the Holy Ghost. Thus, as it was not only a divine person, but He as man, dead and risen, who is the foundation of the mystery, so there was to be another divine person sent down by the Father and Son upon earth to communicate the knowledge, and make good the blessing, and bring souls into the enjoyment, of God's infinite grace in Christ, as well as of the glory which is proper to Him. This is the Church of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Ghost; such is its portion even now.

You will understand, therefore, that when we speak of the Church of God now, when we read of it in the Bible, we are not to suppose a mere aggregate of individuals who are regenerate of the Spirit and look to Christ for salvation. There never was a time since sin came into the world, that God did not work in souls. There never will be a time, till the new heavens and earth, but there will be a line of such believers on the earth. We speak now of that which Pentecost beheld — a sight absolutely new, yea, not even revealed in the Scripture. The testimony of the New Testament is abundant, explicit, and decisive about it. A few remarks may tend to make this plain. In the great body of the Old Testament we have the Jew, by God's institution, kept entirely distinct from the Gentile, without a question as to the character of the Jew or the faith of the Gentile. There were believers, of course, among Jews, as there were certainly, from time to time, believers among Gentiles. The word of God proves this, so that it ought not to be a matter for debate or doubt; for it is a fact in His ways and a certainty in His word.

But believers did not previously form one body; and more than this, there was no such thing ever promised or thought of in the Old Testament times, as any one forming a part of the body of Christ. Not only none of the saints, whose experience comes so largely before us in the law, psalms, and prophets, ever so speaks, but no prophet ever contemplates our proper oneness with the Lord. The attempt so to apply the expression in Isaiah 26: 19, "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise," is (if it may be so said without offence) an evident absurdity. The Church is not a dead body, but

expressly in living union with the Head. We are "quickened with Christ." It is an abuse of all propriety to allow for a moment that the Holy Ghost, who dwells in the Church, would ever be supposed to fill a body that is a mere corpse in the sight of God. The truth is, as may be seen another time more fully, that in this verse God speaks by His prophet to the Jewish people, and that they, as we know well from many parts of the word of God, are treated as now utterly dead. It is not that God will not raise them out of the sleep of death; but just as the Lord, in going to raise the daughter of the Jewish ruler, dealt with her that slept, so will it be with the Jewish people by and by. But the Church never is, under any circumstances, so described; it had no relation to God before it is called by grace into living union with Christ. And I venture to ask, In what sense could it ever be described as His dead body? It is of the dead body of Israel, then, that Jehovah thus speaks. It is not a question in Isaiah 26 of the Church, the body of Christ, the living Head in heaven, any more than in Ezekiel 37, Daniel 12 and Hosea 6 (Compare, for the Assyrian, Nahum 3: 18, and for the world, Romans 11: 15.) Israel had to Jehovah the relation of His people, which they forfeited under a broken law and a rejected Messiah, till divine mercy again raise them as from the grave and Jehovah own them as His: "My dead body shall they arise."

To this, then, I would call your attention. The parenthesis of judgment has been already shown to exist in God's dealings with Israel, during which the literal seed have lost for the time their standing and title of God's people in the earth; namely, from the Babylonish captivity till the Saviour, welcomed in their hearts in the name of Jehovah, re-appear and own them, and establish His kingdom in their midst with visible power and love. Besides, there is another parenthesis, which may be called the parenthesis of grace. This begins with Jesus rejected even to the cross, and raised up from the dead; but not yet to judge Israel and the Gentiles that have been guilty of that foul sin of refusing and putting Him to death. It is Jesus raised up and taking a new place in the fullest mercy in heaven, not only sending far and wide the message of grace to sinners upon the earth, but the Holy Ghost Himself sent down, and uniting those who now believe in His name both to Christ and to one another, members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones, thus by the Spirit baptized and made one body, even now first upon earth, but surely never to be severed in heaven. But then for the first time is seen upon earth that strange spectacle and wondrous reality of divine grace, the Jew and Gentile joined together upon the common ground of union with Christ by the Holy Ghost.

And what a mighty preparation for this new work of God! Redemption accomplished, forgiveness and justification enjoyed, access into the holiest of all given, risen life and sonship made known, earthly priesthood, sacrifices, temple, everything that was connected with that mere visible and tangible scene here below completely disappearing, and these saints not in possession of the privileges here named individually alone, but united as a body to Christ the Lord at the right hand of God, conscious of their union with Him, waiting for Him to take them to Himself, to be with Him in that heaven where they know Him, and to which their hearts continually turn as their own proper home and portion — theirs because He, Christ their life, is there. Nothing of this did or could exist in the days that preceded Pentecost: not even unbelief can deny this, though it may display its blind baseness by treating it all as a mere question of circumstantial differences. Thus it is strictly, what I have called it, a *parenthesis* of grace; for it runs on from Christ's going up to heaven, and terminates with His coming again from heaven to receive those who are waiting for Him upon the earth. But when the Lord renews His connection with the Jews, and establishes His kingdom, the kingdom of the heavens, over the earth in the age to come, there will be no such fact as a head in heaven, nor, consequently, saints on earth joined in any such relation to Him as His one body by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

Is it, that there will be no such blessing as the Holy Ghost then poured out? Assuredly there will;

but we must remember that, before Christ came, the Holy Ghost had ever been at work, for there was no dealing of God in the ancient world, from creation down to our Saviour's presence and departure from it, without the agency of the Holy Ghost. It mattered not what it might be, judgment, mercy, power; skill, or wisdom, He was always the active Person of the Trinity. His it is evermore to deal with soul or body. I do not say that He is the object before them: the grace of God has given us this in Jesus Christ the Son; but the Holy Spirit is the inward agent who acts on and in men, and the power that effectuates, let it be in creation, providence, redemption, government, or any thing else that God accomplishes in the earth. Not only will the ordinary action of the Spirit abide, but there will be an effusion of the Spirit of God even more largely than ever in the millennium. How, indeed, could it be otherwise in the day when our Lord Jesus Christ will govern the earth, and cause blessing to flow as a river everywhere! We know that the Spirit will be poured out upon all flesh. (Joel 2)

There will be a diffusion of good in power all the world over, richer far, at least in point of extent, than has ever been experienced here below. But it will not be, in most important respects, the same character of blessing as now. Christ will have come once more in person, and will visibly govern the universe. It would be presumptuous and vain for any one to attempt to define details; but we have, on the warrant of God's word, the assurance that our Lord Jesus will come, will sit as a Priest on His throne, will reign in righteousness over the earth, and thus be the head not only of Israel but of the Gentiles too. All this is certain, and along with it we again find both a land and a people peculiarly holy and specially near the great King. We have others, too, owned and blessed, a little farther off. That is, we have Jews and Gentiles separated as of old. I do not mean that things will be resumed absolutely according to what was under the Levitical system; for the new covenant and the Messiah reigning in glory involve great differences. Nevertheless there will be certain fundamental points of community between the two.

At the same time God, having once caused the tide of blessing to flow toward the Gentiles, will never depart from His grace, save in execution of judgment on adversaries. In the millennium, whatever may be the blessing of Israel, He will hold to it that the Gentiles are to rejoice with His people. But then this in itself is a very different thing from its present realization in the Church, wherein Jewish and Gentile distinctions disappear, and those who now believe are, by the Holy Ghost dwelling in them, made members of the risen exalted Man, Christ Jesus in heaven, the Holy Ghost being not merely poured out, but personally sent. The mission of the Comforter in person from heaven is the true distinction between the action of the Holy Ghost now, as compared either with the Old Testament times or the wide-spread blessing of which Scripture assures through Him in the future. Hence the presence of the Holy Ghost personally sent down from heaven (1 Peter 1) subsists now in such sort as was not true before Christ, and as is not to be after He comes to reign over the earth.

The truth of this (precious as the outpouring of the Spirit may be by and by), as it has often been before us in various forms, so will appear from many of the Scriptures which will come before us in the course of these lectures. Indeed, any one familiarly acquainted with the Word of God will allow (and the more familiar, the more easily he will see and allow), that, in uttering what has gone before, a vast body of Scripture proof has been before my eyes in making these general observations.

Some very important consequences flow from this revelation of the Church of God, on which I would now say a few words, and on the hopes that are proper to the Christian. The statement of the truth as to this will of itself expose what it must necessarily displace and overturn — the earthly unfounded expectations which have been associated with the Church, because its heavenly character was unknown. My object is to prove and render evident that these truths are not merely important in themselves, but that they carry with them practical effects, not only for our outer walk, but also for the

affections and inner discipline of the soul.

First of all, for all just laid down as to the Church of God, I appeal to the New Testament as a whole, and to every passage in detail which treats of the Church. Let me point also to the patent facts of the Old Testament, in contrast with what cannot be denied to be the teaching of the Holy Ghost in the New. If these things be so, let me ask how far our souls enter into this astonishing place of holy intimacy and near relationship to our God and Father, as well as to Christ our Lord. Have we weighed what becomes of those who even now are one with Christ members of His body, who have the Holy Ghost Himself dwelling in us? You will have noticed how it is assumed in Scripture, that this relation to God and Christ in the power of the Spirit supposes the consciousness of our union with Christ. How is it, then, that there can be members of Christ's body who have no such apprehension of their blessedness? The sad fact is, that the greatest mischief has been done to souls by mingling the hopes, the experience, the thoughts, and feelings too, which are produced by the revelation of Christ and the Church with the experience, the expectations, and the ways of God's dealing that attach to the Old Testament saints. The Old Testament is as divine as the New; there is no part of it but what is of God. No one, therefore, can justly weaken or undervalue one word of either. But they are not the same. They differ, not in measure or degree only, but in character. Does this grate upon any heart here? Are there those who feel it to be unduly strong to affirm that the Church of God is, in its own proper nature, an absolutely new and heavenly thing? Let me ask such, if it be not worthy of God that He should put honour on His Son — His Son crucified upon the cross? Is it not worthy of God that, when all which the Old Testament would lead us to expect connected with the Messiah was rudely dashed to the ground in the cross, when the Jew and the Gentile emulated each other in hatred and contempt of His Son, — is it not worthy of Him, and due to His own Son, that He should make that moment of all others to be the one for bringing out counsels hid in Himself from everlasting, which alone involve and manifest an adequate value for Jesus and Him crucified, for the Son of God, who had hung in shame, sorrow, and suffering, judged even of God Himself, for sin, yea, for our sins?

If earth refused Him, what did heaven? It opens and receives Him. Heaven had opened before when Jesus was here: now it once more opens to testify, not merely the complacency of God the Father in the Son, as He walked upon the earth, but what the feeling of God the Father was about the Son, when, having been crucified, He was raised from the dead. It became then a question what God would do for His Son. What could He do for Him in that nature in which He had been despised, and had suffered to the uttermost? He set Him up "far above all principalities and powers in heavenly places." Was that enough? It was not enough. Take the very worst, the vilest of men, and He will prove who the Son is; He will show what the value of that cross is; He will show the power of the precious blood to cleanse from all sin; He will show what the power of that life which is in Him is to them. The consequence is, that God then brings out counsels which He had kept secret before. He had promised the earth to Israel; He had ensured blessing to the Gentiles through Israel and in them; and all was necessarily connected with and dependent on Christ, because it was only so that either Israel or the nations could be blessed. But to whom had He ever promised the heavens? There all, as far as the Old Testament is concerned, might have seemed reserved for God Himself. No, He first puts the Second man above the heavens; for the wonderful truth is, that it is not merely in Christ viewed as the everlasting Son, which of course He was, but that which now shines out in the truth is, that all glory is conferred on man. It is in human nature that Christ is raised and exalted into the highest place in heaven. Let all the angels of God worship Him.

It was not enough that Jesus personally should be thus in heaven; but what was the value of His work? That work was for sin; it was for sinners; it was also for God's glory, vindicating His character

in every respect about sin; and now sin, awful as it is and destructive without Christ, becomes the occasion for God to display how Christ and Christ's work and Christ's blood triumph over every trace and effect of sin. The consequence is that now God could bring out the wonderful and hidden counsel, that whosoever believes in Christ is not only saved, is not only quickened, pardoned, justified, but has the Holy Ghost dwelling in him. So the Holy Ghost unites him to Christ.

Let us carefully warn those who hear or read. You often find persons talking about being united to Christ *by faith*. It is an unfortunate phrase. There is no such thing as being united by faith. It is the Holy Ghost personally given who unites to Christ. It is the bond of One who is divine, and not merely of faith. It is admitted that faith is the gift of God. It is produced by the Holy Ghost, of course; but, beloved friends, to form a union between Christ and men upon earth, there is much more needed besides all this. If this be so, it evidently and at once sweeps away the theories of men about the Church of God. According to Scripture, His assembly in the New Testament consists not exactly of believers, but of the believers who live now that the Holy Ghost, come down from heaven, baptized them into one body. The Holy Ghost is now given as the seal of redemption and the earnest of the inheritance. There was no such state of things before Christ died, rose, and went to heaven. There was the Spirit regenerating or quickening souls by giving them faith in Christ; but He could not be the seal till the redemption was accomplished, of which He is the seal. Again, there will not be the earnest of the inheritance, when the inheritance of glory is itself come. There we have the two ends, as it were, on either side of the Church completely put out of sight and reckoning. When the glory of God illumines Zion, when the knowledge of His glory fills the earth, as the waters cover the sea, the time for the joint-heirs to take with Christ the inheritance will have arrived. Where would be the want or wisdom of an "earnest," when the inheritance itself is enjoyed? The truth is, that then the Holy Ghost will no longer act after this sort at all. Now He is the Comforter, or Patron; now He intercedes for us, yea, in us, with groanings unutterable. Why? The saints are in sorrow and trial; they are supposed to be always suffering, yet looking forward to reign with Christ; but when the Lord reigns, when the earth is blessed and the enemy bound, the action of the Holy Ghost, will, of course, take a shape in accordance with so complete a change. There will be no need to give a divine stamp to the groans of men on earth, when there is really nothing but joy, and gladness, and peace, and righteousness everywhere. When all is thus bright, and evil is kept out, it is not the season for One to come and console the heart with the hope of future blessedness and glory on high. It is clearly another character suited to the new state of things, as Scripture abundantly proves.

Thus the Church differs essentially from the Old Testament saints; though they were as truly regenerate as we are, and just as certainly looking to, and resting upon, Christ alone: else they would not be saints at all. So, in the millennium also, clearly there will be a divine knowledge of God in Christ, with self-judgment in His sight, or repentance, in every one who is born of God. The fact that Christ will be then displayed in glory, will not set aside the need of the operation of the Spirit in the soul, any more than when Christ was upon earth. Then, as before, the Spirit of God had to work in quickening power. Nevertheless, who can deny that the Lord Jesus distinctly intimated to the disciples (who had received Him, believed in His name, and were born of water and of the Spirit,) that there was some further blessing to be conferred on them shortly, which they had not yet got; that it was expedient for *them*, not merely for Him, that He should go away (for else the Comforter could not come); and that He, when He went, would send the Paraclete to be in them for ever? We can all understand that it was expedient for Christ to enter into His glory above, but it was also expedient for them. The expediency lay in this, that else they could not have the Holy Ghost in that personal way in which He was to be given and sent down from heaven. Christ went up, and the Holy Ghost came down; and now, from that day to this, the Holy Ghost dwells in every believer who rests on redemption in Christ; He dwells also

in the Church of God. (John 14 - 16; 1 Cor. 3, 6, 12; 2 Cor. 6)

It would divert me from my present aim if I entered into the ecclesiastical bearings of this weighty matter, such as the gathering together and the worship of God's children. I am now viewing the Church in connection with the ways of God, so as to develop the ground of its distinctive hope. Viewed as it may be, it is evident that there is an entirely new creation brought to light upon earth answering to an entirely new thing in heaven, — a man, a glorified Head there, who is God too. As Christ never before was a Head, as He only became Head when He went up to heaven after redemption was accomplished, so there was no such thing before on earth as the membership of His body. With this is bound up the Holy Ghost personally sent down, who makes us to be members of Christ; as it is said, "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." It is not here a question of "one faith," but "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit;" it expressly concerns the Holy Ghost working in this new and intimate manner. Not merely by believing, but "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." (1 Cor. 12: 13.) This supposes the presence of the Holy Ghost, who is now given to be in the believer, and joins in one all believers, no matter what they may have been previously. (See also Eph. 2)

This, then, is what, so to speak, makes the Church to be the Church. It is the prime, capital, constitutive element of God's Church, as the New Testament puts the case. But, moreover, the Holy Ghost is not here to draw attention to His own presence, however truly He is here and should be felt to be here. In fact, it is not so that He works at all. It is certain that He was sent down, and that He is here; it is very important, too, that the believer should own, know, and enjoy His presence; but still, the way in which He asserts His power is by exalting Christ. Hence, among His other glories, He maintains that Jesus is Lord, and consequently that there is no room for the allowance of human will in the Church of God, or for the interference of any authority as to divine things from without. Nay, more than this: all interference from within, save just so far as it is the Holy Ghost controlling the members of the body for the purpose of glorifying Christ (which conscience, guided by the word of God, has to discern), is a thing offensive to God and destructive of the very object of His Church upon the earth.

But if this be the character of the Church, and the power that works in it now, if herein lies the great test to decide what is of God and what is not, namely, the exalting of the Saviour, I would ask, What does Scripture reveal as to the course and hopes of the Church of God here below? The New Testament, far from being silent, speaks much of both. Was the Church now to abide triumphant in unbroken progress? Was it infallibly to accomplish its immense work of worthily representing the grace and glory of Christ? Certainly Israel had broken down in its fruitless task, as the Gentiles had, as to their responsibility, wrought still more abominable corruption. What was to become of the Church of God? First of all, it differs widely from all others, its predecessors. The Church of God is not of this creation in any true sense. It is a stranger on the earth. It belongs to the heavens, where its Head is already, and whence the Spirit of glory and of God comes to form and fill it. Hence the New Testament continually keeps up this immense and fundamental truth, although the members of the Church of God may take up a certain place in the earth as for the moment succeeding Israel. The Jews were the people of God before, the members of the Church are now; the baptized are responsible to be witnesses for God upon the earth. Although there are some privileges and duties which they have in common with those who went before, they have a special character attaching to themselves alone.

This meets the difficulty which some minds feel in looking at Abraham's seed (Gal. 3) and the olive tree. (Rom. 11) It is quite true that we do follow Israel in these particulars and more. They were the seed of Abraham after the flesh; those who believe in Christ now are Abraham's seed quite as truly, though after another and spiritual manner. We have Christ; and as Christ was, in the highest sense, the promised Seed, in whom are all the promises of God, he that possesses Christ has all the promises

already; for whatever promises there are, in Him is the Yea, and in Him the Amen, for glory to God by us; and in Him God has established us, who also has sealed us and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

There is more, however, to be noticed. Not only are the true believers thus Abraham's seed in a yet better and closer way than the literal Israel, because they have all in Christ; but also professing Christendom, or that which confesses the name of Christ here below, has an important place. This is the solemn matter treated of in Romans 11. The men of Israel were unfaithful to their trust, and made God's law odious and contemptible. The Gentile now, or professing Christendom, baptized unto Christ's name, is responsible to bear witness to God's goodness in the gospel; and, in point of fact, whatever light there is, whatever testimony in any way for God, is found, not among the Jews, but among the baptized. The Jews are hard, dry, blind, and dead, as their own commodities and pursuits. They understand not the very Scriptures they vainly hold in their hands. They are ashamed, abashed, and confounded even before the feeblest true confessor of the name of Jesus; for it is too evident that, whatever may have been the light of Israel in olden time, it is now extinct and gone. The faithless Jewish branches are withered, and broken off: It is on the shoulders of the Gentile profession that any true testimony to God is borne. I say the Gentile "*profession*," because even those nominal Christians who are not born of God still have the outward light, which the Jews lack. Among them exclusively is there any recognition of the grace of God. There only is the gospel preached, and more or less truly even by unconverted people. They may not follow Christ, they may not receive the truth in Him; but still there is the holding out the word and name of Christ, especially His cross. But then all the mass of outside profession of Christ, although there is truth in it which is found no where else, is fast vanishing away, and we are now living in days when Christendom hastens to its ruin; and the strange sight grows apace, not merely of infidels (for there have been at all times plenty of infidels), not merely of profane men who mock and triumph at the abuses of Christendom, but of men who are apostates, though in every imaginable position of the Church so-called; not only professing the name of Christ, but setting up to be the teachers, chief rulers, and pillars of the Christian profession. Thus we have not alone the gross men, who deride the Bible and every truth in the Bible in proportion to its value and its glory, but (woe is me to say it with the sad conviction of its certainty!) the defence of the truth seems yet more ominous than even the attacks upon it. It is the pitifully feeble resistance to these assailants under the Christian name and garb; it is the lax and compromising style adopted by those who are accepted as orthodox and true men; it is the letting in of the fatal principle, that Scripture contains errors, demonstrable errors, they will tell you, and this not coming from the rationalistic party, but from those who boast of the gospel, and who in the same context profess to be the champions of inspiration: these are the signs which portend the speedy "falling away." What must be the result? If these be the thoughts and words of men who stand for revealed truth, what can be expected from the advocates of free-thinking? If such is the actual state, what may be looked for in Christendom, when God sends strong delusion that men should believe a lie?

But along with this, God has sent forth a cry at midnight, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh." And the good and gracious One who, thereby, has awakened souls afresh, and awakens them everywhere to the return of His Son from heaven — He who has wrought, spite of every hindrance in the way of indifference, scorn, and opposition, has also now vindicated His word, as it never was vindicated, since the early Church turned aside to mingle fables with it. The earliest writings of Christian antiquity evince the awful tampering by Judaisers, Gnostics, and superstition-mongers with the purity of the word of God; the latest writings, in the midst of approaching apostacy, are by contrast the best of all "evidences," not only to His word, but also to His Spirit's grace in the recovery of long-lost and precious treasures.

In very deed, God is now graciously recalling souls; and mark His way. To what does He arouse them first of all? To Christ in heaven, to the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, filling hearts on earth with the consciousness of their relationship to Christ and of His love. And what are the effects? The perfect, happy, holy liberty of the Christian, heavenly joy in certainty of the Saviour's love, and of communion with Him in thorough growing separation from the world, in every shape of it, that hated Him. And what then? Has all this no bearing on the Lord's coming? God forbid the unbelieving thought. Surely it has much every way. When has there been anything like the present expectancy of Christ? I am aware that speculative men will tell you that cries have been heard continually in seasons of agitation among men, that the Lord was coming. But I am bold to affirm that there never was anything like the present attitude and tone of waiting for the Lord. The truth is, that there has been, from time to time, no small panic. Men have quailed, fearing that the day of judgment was just at hand. Is this the same thing as the bright, joyous hope of the Bridegroom's coming? Is this going out to meet Him? No doubt at the year A.D. 600 a general alarm pervaded Christendom; and the year of grace 1000 witnessed a still more violent fright (for it really was unworthy of a better name). They shuddered at the thought that the Lord was just coming to judge the world. Since these days there have been times, generally of external change and confusion — states convulsed, revolutions of kingdoms, etc., and the poor children of men and of God, too, frightened like hares, have thought and feared, ay, *feared*, that the Lord was at the doors. But can any fair man, with a judgment formed on the word of God, confound these painful rumours, these humiliating panics about the day of judgment, with the Lord calling out the virgins to go in with Him to the marriage?

It is not merely, you will observe, that they are awakened by the cry heard at midnight: this but recalls the virgins to their original position, which they had abandoned to sleep more at ease. Grace reawakens them; and they retake their lamps now trimmed, with oil in their vessels' end once more go out to meet the bridegroom. They do not stay where they were; they leave all that had detained them from their proper object; they burst through all earthly impediments; they cast aside the rags of human tradition. It is the prophetic picture of the recovered hope of the saints, acting on their hearts after a long eclipse, of souls neither excited nor alarmed, but in sympathy with the love of the Saviour, and awaiting His coming with peace and joy in their souls. Is there nothing like this going on now? I appeal to those who love the Lord and the Church; and the more they know what is going on in the Church, and the more honest they are in answering, the better. Is not the midnight cry being made? Is there no going forth to meet Christ? It seems to me there can be but one answer, wherever spiritual intelligence and honesty are found. Since the apostles passed away, never till now has there been the appearance of any such awakening in the hearts of the saints all over the world; never before this joyful welcome, taking the place of sleep that used to be only disturbed by dreams of distress.

And another thing is in its way to be marked. It is not a set of persons satisfied with themselves, or wishing to use this cry in order to make a party. God forbid such a misuse! The cry goes out from the saints of God, wherever they may be, and penetrates where it is least expected. It has been heard in Catholicism. It has rung through Protestantism. Neither nationalism nor dissent have been able to stifle the call. Despite of all past sloth or present barriers and stumbling-blocks, the wise virgins go out to meet the Bridegroom. It is for none to say how far the Lord may carry the call, or to what extent He may give it effect. I do say it is a dangerous thing for souls to wait to see this or that result produced, before they go forth with oil in their vessels. Let the eye be only on Christ. Let the heart ever rest on the precious truth that we are one with Him, joyful in the taste of His love by the Holy Ghost now, and we shall soon reciprocate the longing of His heart who says, "Behold, I come quickly." If we know what He is to us here, we shall earnestly desire unbroken fellowship with Himself in heaven. And if saints only in a larger measure enter into this most precious portion for the heart, they will not be able to rest

where there is not a practical testimony to it in their hearts and their homes, in their walk and their worship. The hope is just as practical as the faith of God's elect, and must be carried out into the details of each day. It is, indeed, the necessary homage of the saint, and due to the Lord and His truth. Therefore every time when they meet together as children of God, those who are conscious of such a call to go out to meet the Saviour, cannot do without the assurance that they are on such a scriptural ground, and so guided by the word and Spirit of God, as to leave them happy in welcoming Him from heaven.

One may gather then what is the position of the Church in reference to Christ's coming, even from the very cursory sketch that I have been able to give to-night. Only the general thought of the Church and its hope is here presented, in contrast with Jew and Gentile, without entering as yet into the rapture of the saints, or any question as to those who must pass through the future tribulation. As this is reserved for another occasion, I must for the present pass over many Scriptures of deep moment, content with no more than the broad and general aspect of that which the New Testament predicates of the Church. I trust however that every Christian here, small as may be his spiritual discernment, may see that such a new and wondrous relation as the union of the Christian and of the Church with Christ opens the door for a hope that is no less precious and special. He must be dull indeed who recognises nothing more in John 14, for instance, or in 1 Thess. 4, than that which was expected by the saints of old, and expressed in the language of the Psalms and the prophets. Far different is that which the New Testament presents to the heart. What is the hope of the Church there? Is it social improvement or human progress? Is it even spreading the gospel throughout the whole world, and the conversion of the Jews? Not one of these things is our proper hope.

Do I mean, then, that it is not the duty of the Christian to preach the gospel, or to further the preaching of it, to every creature? Far from it; yea, in this as in other respects, I say, the Church is guilty; we ourselves, we are guilty. When I think what the Church was and will be, when I think what the Saviour was and will be and ever is, and then of what we have been and are, I for one cannot but confess we are verily guilty for the poor, scant, feeble testimony to God's grace we tender to every creature. Bear with me if I say, beloved friends, that I believe we have, in the present condition of Christendom, peculiarly to watch against a snare that is incident to the true position most of us are in. Beware of substituting a judgment of others, in their wrong ways of doing God's work, for your own loving sympathy and right service. May we all have grace earnestly, humbly, self-denyingly, to help on the work of God ourselves. May we rather search how to help and sympathize with our brethren? It is an easy thing comparatively to criticise the various religious societies — for instance, those for missionary purposes and Bible circulation. It is not difficult for one to discern ways, means, and objects even, which are contrary to the word of God. Nor do I wish to weaken godly feeling as to all this for a moment. No doubt, the way in which the world is appealed to and mingled with the Church is a fatal vice, ruinous to the testimony of God, and contradictory to the whole character of His Church. It is the same kind of sin as for the wife of a loving husband to play him false, giving herself up to that which is as shameful to her as contrary to his honour and love. Let no one infer the least indifference to the sin of Christendom, to the duty of entire separation of the Christian from the world in doing the work of God. But this does not alter my conviction, that we ought to be ashamed on our part that we so little feel our identification with God's testimony on earth, that our sympathies are so dull and intermittent for His workmen and His work in every form, that we have and show so little self-renunciation, so little energy of heart in throwing ourselves into every movement of the Spirit of God whenever it may be done with a good conscience. Let us remember, "For My sake, and the gospel's." (Mark 10) What an answer in the day of the Lord, to say that we have not done this, and we have kept from that! It is quite right that we should not be drawn into unscriptural and offensive ways; but we ought surely, when we

separate in sorrow but none the less thoroughly from that which is evil, to look up to God for grace that we may know His way of doing His own work, and that we be found in it heartily. "Blessed is that servant whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so *doing*."

The Church from the beginning has reason to be ashamed. We ought more thoroughly and universally to have carried out the gospel to every creature. It was, it is the business of the Christian here below — not the whole business, nor yet the most blessed part; but still a most sweet privilege, a most suitable and bounder duty; for duty we have just as much as privilege. We ought then and thus to have been found in our measure scattering the good seed throughout the field of the world. Let us own that it has not been done, and that we have our own great shortcoming to confess.

What, then, is the present state of things? and what does the word of God warrant the believer in expecting? Exactly what has been, growing declension — at last, apostasy. The apostasy may not yet be complete, but it is ripening. The "mystery of iniquity," as the apostle himself says, "doth already work." The secret mischief was going on in his days; and what more solemn than the inspired intimation that the mystery of iniquity, even then at work, would go on till it ended in the apostasy, and in the revelation of the man of sin who should be destroyed by the manifestation of the Lord's coming? There is thus an uninterrupted chain of evil, first in the hidden form, and then in full development, never to be set aside by the gospel nor any energy of faith in the Church, but to await the final personal judgment of the Lord Jesus at His appearing. Here, then, not only the hope of the Church, even Christ Himself coming as the Bridegroom, but also His appearing in the way of judgment, are connected. The Church should joyfully, but patiently, wait for the one; Christendom cannot escape the other by false expectations and evil ways which only hasten that day.

It is evident that the practical effect is immense. Suppose, for example, that I am looking at the Church as having a vast future before it in this world, that it is to triumph over all adversaries, that it is to fill the whole world with the fruit of divine blessing. What will be the effect of such an expectation? Why, I cast myself into every kind of instrumentality for the purpose of bringing about these desired results. But if one knows that, on the contrary, the evil is going on rapidly to ruin, that it began in apostolic days, and that it is irreparable; if one knows that the lawlessness of Christendom is surging up higher and stronger than ever; if one knows that every moral sign around betokens the speedy outburst into a flame of that which is now in preparation for the great catastrophe; how will all this affect the spirit? Of course I shall rejoice in having the Saviour as the hope of my heart — a hope shared with every saint of God, whether living or fallen asleep. But if I know that He is coming to receive us, and then in due season to judge all that is found here below (Christendom the most severely of all, as being the servant that "knew his master's will, and did it not"), what will be the effect? That I shall seek to separate myself from every act, habit, course, or association which the word of God condemns to my conscience; that I shall desire to be found with loins girded and light burning, and myself like one that waits for his lord.

Other opportunities may offer for drawing out the rich, practical consequences of this truth. Tonight I would leave the great but simple fact resting on the minds of those that are listening to me; and I pray that God Himself may lead all our souls to look well to it; first, that we are really appreciating the place which grace has given us as members of Christ's body, the Church of God; that, if we do value it, we may be found carrying it out, not merely now and then, but every day; and that we allow nothing to draw us aside from the practical expression of our hope, and of our allegiance to our Lord, as of our thankfulness for the infinite mercy shown in bringing us into God's Church. The great bane of Christendom from the beginning has been either slipping into the world, courting it, valuing earthly objects on the one side, or on the other taking up Jewish elements, which is a mere religious,

vain show, and now treated by the Holy Ghost in us Gentiles as no better than idolatry. (Gal. 4) But whether it be the Jewish element or the worldly conformity, they are alike destructive of the real separate and heavenly character of God's Church.

Again, we see that there is a hope which fits the Church of God. As Christ is the Head of the Church, so He is its hope: it is His own person and His own personal coming, to be with Himself above. It is not merely our going, but His coming for us; neither is it alone the individual soul happy and delivered from the sorrows and trials of this world, but every member of His body changed into conformity to the body of His glory — the dead raised, the living transformed; and both caught up with joy to the Saviour, our life and our Head, come from heaven to receive us unto Himself, and present us before the Father in His house on high.

With remarkable clearness does the apostle distinguish the hope even from the inheritance of glory in the prayer which closes Ephesians 1 "That ye may know," says he, "what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead and you," etc. The calling of God is detailed in the earlier verses of the chapter; the central verses develop the riches of the glory of God's inheritance (which He takes, not immediately and personally, so to speak, not in Christ alone, but also in the saints, who are not the inheritance, but rather the heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ). Then this prayer asks for them that they might know, not exactly God's calling, but the hope of it, — their bright future portion in Christ suited to it when every thing inconsistent with the divine nature and our relationship to God shall have disappeared, and all shall be actually and only in full flow, fruition, and harmony with Him in whose presence we shall be. Next, it is sought that they might know "the riches of the glory of his inheritance," which, boundless as it is in glory, is nevertheless a prospect inferior to the "hope," inferior even to the saints who are the objects of the love of Christ and of the Father, with which "the hope" connects itself. The third request (on which, however, I must not now enlarge) is, that they might know what is the exceeding greatness of God's power towards us who believe, even that the self-same power which raised up Christ is that which has quickened us together with Christ, raised and seated us together in heavenly places in Him. How blessed and special then is the hope of God's calling, as well as all that follows! Nor is it surprising after all to those who know who and what God is, and what is His love and value for Christ, seeing that He has given Him to be head over all things to the Church which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. The hope must be and is worthy of such infinite love and blessing.

Such is the Christian hope. Distinctly and in due time there follows also the manifest execution of His judgment upon that which bears the name of His Church, but is not - upon everything in Christendom that is false and contrary to His glory. He will judge the world. He will judge, but not as unhappy men of Christian antiquity imagined (which I just mention by the way, to show the early, rapid and dreadful defection from the truth). They actually thought that if a man were ever so wicked but baptized, he would be better off in the day of judgment — better off even if cast into hell-fire than a mere Jew or Gentile. What a clear proof that these men, miscalled "the fathers of the Church," but really its corrupters, polluted the sources of truth from the beginning, and contributed amazingly to the ruin of Christendom to this day! This is not said from prejudice, nor from a mere dip into their writings, but from some acquaintance with the best. That gross error, inconsistent with an adequate knowledge of Christianity or any right moral measure, is found in those who are considered the chief. Does it not prove how rapid and deadly the departure was from the deposit of God's truth? In fact, it was the working of the mystery of iniquity, or part of it. Now things become bolder; now the apostate character,

and not corruption merely, becomes more and more apparent; the hatred, the scorn of the Church's true character, and not merely of its privileges (for, alas! they are unknown), but even of the common principles which a Jew would have known and valued as his heritage. If this evil is notoriously going on, even in those that profess to be the defenders of the truth, Christendom is assuredly ground that bears thorns and briers, is rejected and cursed, whose end is to be burned.

In presence of such facts and such a future, what is it which every soul that has not faced these truths in the light of God ought to feel? Let the heart search and see that there be no object between it and Christ, that He can be welcomed day by day as the immediate hope of the Christian. I do not use the word "immediate" to fix a time in the least; but would add this remark, that when Christians talk of not fixing the time, they often mean in reality that they do not understand the question. In heaven, and for heaven, dates have no place; and our hope is a heavenly one. It is on earth, and for earthly matters, that we find the importance of times and seasons. They may be and are measured by the orbs of heaven, but still it is for an earthly people and that Christ is not coming yet. Now, I protest against such a ground of objection, however I may repudiate the fixing of a date. Undoubtedly most who speak about fixing, or not fixing, the time, prove earthly hope. If our place be with Christ on high, we are above them. We are one with Him who sits at the right hand of God. Times and seasons have no value nor bearing there. Whatever delay may be now, the reason is, not a date, but God's long suffering in saving. It will close when God the Father has called out the last member of the body of Christ. It is not that He is "slack concerning his promise;" but when all are called out to heavenly association, Jesus will come to receive His saints who are waiting for Him.

Do you say that there are many saints of God who are not awaiting Him? I dare not say so. I believe that every saint of God loves the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many a saint may be obscure, he may hold wrong theories, he may insert a millennium between himself and Christ's coming, and thus fall under an immense incubus; but he has Christ as his hope for all that, if he loves Christ. It may be a poorly understood hope; there will surely be but a defective display of it; there must be a very partial enjoyment of it; yet it cannot be but that he who has Christ for his life, delights in and longs for the seeing of Christ, and the being with Christ and like Christ. At the same time, I admit, of course, the utter wrongness of interposing a delay by these prophetic misinterpretations; I warn against the admission of any earthly objects whatever between the heart and the coming of Christ. Depend upon it, that it is a great and frequent snare to guard against. It is not merely that some put a millennium between the present moment and His coming; but others again confound their position with Jews and Gentiles, and imagine a fearful tribulation for Christians between the present and the coming of Christ. Those who thus shake souls (2 Thess. 2: 2) are just as guilty as others who take the world now, antedating the millennium (1 Cor. 4: 8) The great tribulation is no more suitable a preparation of the Bride for meeting her Bridegroom than is the millennium. The truth is, Scripture interposes nothing between the heart and Christ. It speaks much of these things, but it never substitutes either of them for the coming of Christ. This too will come before us more fully another time; but I wish to leave on all a sufficiently plain and distinct view from God's word of what the Church is, and of the hope which suits so blessed a relationship to Christ. May it ever be in our ears and hearts!

W.K.