
Recovered Truths

by
Edward Dennett

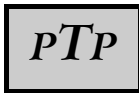
Publisher's Note

This booklet by Ed. Dennett was published in 1875 under the title *Recovered Truths: Being Letters to Certain Believers*. This title explains the several references in the text to letters, since the various topics were written as letters.

The format has been changed and the introductory remarks omitted. Notes in brackets {} have been added; and also Scripture references have been put in a form to facilitate the making of the indices.

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Justification by Faith

Most of you know that God, in His sovereign grace, used Luther to recover, in measure, this precious truth from the corruptions of Popery; that, as wielded by him, it was blessed of God to thousands of souls; and that, speaking generally, it still nominally characterizes the orthodox "churches" of the Reformation. I say nominally, because one cannot but sorrowfully observe that rationalism and superstition are fast regaining their supremacy, even in the very strongholds of Protestantism. I propose then to examine, first of all, this doctrine as commonly held by orthodox Protestants, whether in the Establish- ment ¹ or in Dissent. ²

Its keystone may be said to be the view that Christ, during His life on the earth, *obeyed the law in our stead*; and hence it is said that, when we believe, while the blood of Christ cleanses us from guilt, the obedience of Christ -- His vicarious obedience to the law -- is imputed to us for righteousness, and consequently we are justified before God by faith. Thus theologians speak of the active and the passive obedience of Christ: the active obedience being His obedience to the law, and the passive His sufferings on the cross; and they tell us that the passive availed for atonement, and the active avails for the imputation of righteousness, so that, as soon as I believe in Him, I stand before God in the value of both -- in the value of His sufferings for the remission of sin, and in the value of His substitutional obedience to the law for my righteousness, and that thus meeting all God's demands upon me, I am declared justified.

We have then to inquire whether this doctrine, as so stated, is according to the word of God. You know that I formerly thought so; and, I may add, that I guarded myself on this point when I took my place with "Brethren," though I was immediately told that a difference on such a point was no barrier to fellowship at the Lord's table. But soon after, on carefully reading the epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians, I was startled at the discovery that my views upon this subject had been grounded upon human teachings, and not upon the Scriptures. Instead therefore of a formal exposition, I will just state the process through which I was led on my reexamination of the subject.

1. In the first place, I saw that Abraham was said to be justified by faith four hundred and thirty years *before the law was given*; and thus that the law had nothing to do with his justification; and that the only ground of it was faith in God (Gal. 3:6-29; also Rom. 4). This is the more significant from the fact that Abraham's justification by faith is adduced as the pattern of our own, or rather the principle is asserted to be the same (read Rom. 4:23-25; also Gal. 3:8, 9). Now, if Abraham were justified on faith in God without the imputation of any obedience to the law, and we are justified on faith through the imputation of such obedience, we get at once two contrasted principles of justification, and the

1. {The "Establishment" refers to the Church of England as the church established and supported by the British government.}

2. {"Dissent" and "Dissenters" means those who dissent from the notion of an established church, and met separately from it.}

apostle's argument falls to the ground.

2. In the second place, I found it clearly stated that the Gentiles, and consequently we ourselves, were never under the law. Thus the apostle says, "When the Gentiles *which have not the law*" (Rom. 2:14). Again, he contrasts those under the law with those not under it when he says, The law worketh wrath: for *where no law is*, there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15). And again he contrasts the Jews with the Gentiles, in this respect, when he says, "Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; *to them that are under the law*, that I might gain them that are under the law; *to them that are without law*, as without law," etc. (1 Cor. 9:20, 21). Everywhere, indeed, when treating of this subject, he makes this distinction; and it is because of this distinction that he shows that the justification of Abraham, before law, is the pattern of justification, both for the Jew under the law and for the Gentile without the law. The point however to be observed now is, that if the Gentiles were never under the law (as the apostle asserts continually), the imputation to a believing Gentile of obedience to the law could not be the ground of his justification before God.

3. I was struck with the fact, that the term, the righteousness of Christ, was never used in connection with the doctrine of justification; indeed the term is not found in the New Testament. On the other hand, I discovered that whenever this doctrine is stated the term used is, *God's righteousness* (see Rom. 1:17; 3:21, 22, 25, 26; 10:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9, etc.). This fact, you will admit, is peculiar, if at least it is the obedience of Christ which, imputed to us on faith, becomes our righteousness before God. For it were certainly strange that the Holy Ghost should invariably use the term "God's righteousness," if He had intended to direct our minds to the righteousness of Christ.

But you may reply, "We have the *obedience* of Christ mentioned, and it is precisely that which constitutes our righteousness." Let us then examine this phrase wherever it may be found. The most important place, however, as bearing on this question, is Rom. 5:18, 19: "Therefore as by the offence of one (margin, one offence) judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one (margin, one righteousness) the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." First of all, let me call your attention to the fact that the marginal readings of the 18th verse are admitted by all students of the Scriptures, whatever their doctrinal views, as the correct renderings of the original; and hence the things compared, or rather contrasted, are the *one act of transgression* of the first Adam, and the *one act of righteousness* of the second {last} Adam. This being so, the meaning (for the 19th verse is simply explanatory of the 18th) of the terms "disobedience" and "obedience" in the subsequent verse is evident. It was the act of disobedience on the part of Adam which brought in sin; and it was the act of obedience (i.e. obedience unto death) on the part of Christ which brought in righteousness. That is to say, they are single acts, which are contrasted. This will be rendered still more evident if we turn to another passage. The Lord Himself, speaking of His death, says, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. *This commandment* have I received of my Father" (John 10:17,

18). Clearly in this passage our Lord speaks of His death as an act of obedience. This conclusion will be confirmed beyond a doubt if we turn to Phil. 2. There we are told, in that wondrous description of the humiliation of the Lord Jesus (a description, as others have often said, which also implies a contrast with Adam, who was disobedient unto death), that "He humbled Himself, and became *obedient unto death*, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:9). Both of these passages show us how to interpret Rom. 5:19 for they teach that it is the Lord's obedience unto death which is in the view of the apostle; and that it is this which constitutes the ground of our justification before God. And I must remind you, in confirmation, that not a word is said about obedience to the law in the passage, nor even in the paragraph; but, as pointed out, the simple contrast is between Adam, who dishonored God by his disobedience, and Christ, who glorified God by His obedience unto death.

One other passage may perhaps occur to the minds of some. I refer to Heb. 10:7-10 where the apostle brings in Christ, saying, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." But the tenth verse explains this in perfect accordance with what we have already advanced -- "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." The will of God was therefore accomplished in the sacrifice of Christ.

Having then looked at the several passages in which "the obedience of Christ" is adduced, we may also say that this obedience, in the sense of obedience to law, is never mentioned in connection with the justification of the believer. Let me not be mistaken. The Lord Jesus was always obedient to the Father, the only perfectly obedient One whom the world has ever seen; and He obeyed the law also in all its length, breadth, depth, and height. In fact, He never did His own will; for it was His meat to do His Father's will, and to finish His work. But what I discovered was, that the Scripture never speaks of the living obedience of Christ -- His obedience to the law as the ground of justification.

4. The apostle is careful to assert, over and over again, that righteousness did not, and could not, come by the law. Take an illustration or two of this. In the epistle to the Romans, after showing that "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified," he proceeds, "But now the righteousness of God without the law ($\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma$ νόμου, i.e. apart from law) is manifested." Again, "If righteousness (come) by the law, then Christ is dead in vain" (Gal. 2:21). And yet again, "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law" (Gal. 3:21).

Now, if Christ had obeyed the law in our stead, and that obedience, so rendered, was imputed to the believer for righteousness, would not, I ask, righteousness have been by the law? And hence, had this been the teaching of Scripture, it was simply impossible for the apostle to have used these expressions. But you may say, He means that righteousness could not be obtained by *man* through obedience to the law. My answer is, This is not the apostle's meaning, or he would have made it plain. Had it been so, he would very carefully have explained that righteousness was by the law, though by the substitutionary obedience of Christ. But he makes the broadest possible statements as to the impossibility of righteousness coming through the law;

does not even hint at the obedience of Christ to it; and indeed tells us distinctly that God's righteousness has been manifested altogether apart from law (χωρὶς νόμου).

5. These several points convinced me that the commonly received theological teaching on the subject had no foundation in Scripture. But other considerations pointed in the same direction. For instance, I asked myself, What was the aim and intention of the law? The answer to this question will be found in such passages as these: Rom. 3:20; 5:20; 7:7-12; Gal. 3:19-25, etc.; and from them we may learn two things --

first, that the law was the standard of God's requirements from man, a standard, in other words, of human righteousness; so that, had a man been able to keep the whole law, he would have only been a righteous man *on the earth* -- as such entitled, of course, to all the promises connected with obedience to the law, but still he would have had nothing but a human righteousness;

and **secondly** that it was impossible for man to keep the law, for he had a sinful nature -- he was flesh, and the mind of the flesh "is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7).

Hence God never expected Israel to keep the law, but its end was to give the knowledge of sin. It "entered, that the offence might abound" (Rom. 5:20). "It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Gal. 3:19). God therefore never intended righteousness to come by the law; for the apostle says, "If the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise" (Gal. 3:18). For if it is contended that the inheritance comes to us through the substitutionary obedience of Christ to the law, then the inheritance does come through the law, and this is precisely the thing which the apostle contradicts.

But I need not pursue the subject farther in this direction, for you will now see how I learned that the theological definition of justification is entirely inconsistent with the Scriptures; and I have little doubt that it has sprung from an imperfect knowledge of the believer's true standing in Christ, from a false conception, in fact, of Christianity. For you will find that very few of the advocates of this doctrine know anything of the two natures, or of our being seated in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1 and 2); or indeed, of the full and complete deliverance of the Christian through the death and resurrection of Christ. Not only so; but I am sorry to add that this view of the doctrine is often associated with positive and dangerous error. Thus I have a book before me, written by one of its most popular advocates, in which it is maintained that a Jesus was subjected to the *Father's wrath* during His life on the earth. And if you hold that He was a substitute throughout the whole of His life, I do not see how you can avoid this conclusion. It will show you that the slightest departure from the truth may land you in the most deadly error.

Having given the reasons which led me to reject the common teaching on the subject of justification by faith, I will now ask, What is the Scriptural view of this doctrine? And I think we shall see that, when disencumbered of human reasonings, it is as beautiful as it is simple; that it brings into prominence the

cross of Christ; that it displays more fully the infinite worth of the sufferings and death of Christ; and, consequently, the perfect character of that salvation which the believer possesses in and through the death and resurrection of his great Substitute.

1. In the first place, THE BLOOD OF CHRIST is set forth in the Scriptures as the meritorious ground, or procuring cause, of our justification. That is, the foundation on which God is able righteously to justify those who believe is the precious blood, the death of Christ. We thus read -- "Justified by His blood" (Rom. 5:9); and it may be pointed out that the word "by" does not express the full force of the original. The words are ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, i.e. literally "in His blood," meaning "in the power" or "in the virtue of His blood." The same truth is taught in a previous chapter, "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God has set forth to be a propitiation (mercy-seat) *through faith in His blood*" (Rom. 3:24, 25; cp. Rom. 4:24, 25; Eph. 1:7; Gal. 2:16, 25; 1 Peter 1:18).

We have then to inquire how the blood of Christ becomes the ground of our justification? The blood speaks of a life poured out (for the life is in the blood; and it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul (Lev. 17:11), and consequently of death; and our question therefore is, How does the death of Christ become the meritorious ground of justification? The answer is simple. It becomes this, because of what it accomplished. The Lord Jesus "bare our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24); He "once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18); "He was made sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21); He was "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29); it is He "whom God hath set forth a propitiation (mercy-seat) through faith in His blood" (Rom. 3:25), etc. Combining these passages, and others of a like nature which are scattered throughout the epistles, we discover at once the character of the Savior's death. We learn that not only did He bear substitutionally our sins on the cross, but that also in that awful hour He stood before God under the whole weight of man's sinful condition and responsibility; that He came into the scene where the first Adam failed, and took up all the consequences of that failure, and made a full and everlasting settlement, in His death on the cross, of the whole question, both of our sins and sin, i.e. man's sinful condition. Hence we read that "when He had by Himself purged our *sins*" He "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3); and also, that "once in the end of the world³ hath He appeared to put away *sin* by the sacrifice of Himself"; and that He "was once offered to bear the *sins* of many" (Heb. 9:26-28).

We thus gather that the Lord Jesus in His death met and answered all the claims of God's holiness, and met these claims so perfectly that God is completely satisfied; nay more, that He not only has fully borne and expiated the consequences of man's sin and failure, but that also He has vindicated the honor of God, fully glorified Him about that which had brought ruin and desolation on the earth. For it is not only that Jesus has made atonement; but

3. {"The end of the world" is rightly translated "consummation of the ages." This refers to the O. T. ages of the trial of the first man.}

He has done more; He has, by His death, glorified God in all the attributes of His character. Thus, speaking of His death, He Himself says, "Now is the Sun of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him" (John 13:31, 32); and again, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). The wrath of God was visited upon Christ on the cross, because He was there as the substitute for sinners; for He there bore our sins, and was "made sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). Hence it was that all God's waves and billows went over His head in that awful hour; yea, the waters entered into His soul; and it was under the pressure of the wrath which He endured, when it pleased the Lord to bruise Him, to put Him to grief, to make His soul an offering for sin (Isa. 53:10), that He cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). But (blessed be His name) He drained that fearful cup to its very dregs, exhausted all the judgment of God against sin, and thereby made a full, sufficient, and everlasting atonement, and vindicated, because He had met and sustained, all the claims of God's holiness, and glorified Him completely and for ever.

2. Such was the character of the death of Christ; and hence His precious blood is of such infinite value before God that *on this foundation He can meet and justify the ungodly*; yea, be "*just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus*"; and consequently the "righteousness of" God is "upon all them that believe" (Rom. 3:22, 26). That is to say:

God is just, and justifies in virtue of Christ. He is just, because sin has been met in the cross; sin has been judged of God; it has been suffered and atoned for by Christ. More than that: the Lord Jesus has so magnified God, and so glorified His character, that, instead of the obligation being, as it was, altogether on man's side, who was accumulating that which never could be paid for by him, God now has interposed, and having been so magnified in the man Christ Jesus in His death, He is now positively just when He justifies the soul which believes in Jesus. It is consequently the righteousness of *God*; for God is now approving Himself righteous to the claims of Christ.⁴

For Christ died for sinners; and those who believe stand before God in all the infinite value of that precious blood which He shed for them as their substitute. God therefore righteously pardons, accepts, justifies every believer: that righteousness which flowed out to Christ, raised Him from the dead, and glorified Him at His right hand, meets also and embraces every one who believes in Jesus, and brings him where Christ is in the presence of God. It could not be otherwise; for since the blood has met all God's claims, and even glorified Him, every sinner, the moment he believes, stands invested with all its infinite value. It is, therefore, in response to the value of the blood, that God's righteousness -- for it is due to Christ -- flows out rejoicingly, and invests the sinner with its own perfection, so that in Christ he is justified for ever before God. Yea, he is accepted in the Beloved {Eph. 1:6}.

This interpretation will be confirmed if we look for a moment at the display of God's righteousness towards Christ Himself. In the prospect of leaving the

4. W. Kelly, The Righteousness of God: What is It?

world, He could say (anticipatively) "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work thou gavest me to do." And, taking His stand upon His completed work, He proceeds, "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:4, 5). That is, He now looked to the Father to glorify Him on account of what He had done on the earth; and God met this claim when He raised Christ from the dead, and glorified Him at His own right hand. That is, Christ having borne the judgment for sin and sins, and so borne it as to satisfy all God's claims, and to glorify God in all that He is, *God's righteousness was now displayed in raising Christ from the dead and glorifying Him at His own right hand*. In a word, it was due to Christ, on account of what He did as our substitute, that He should be glorified. And God has done it; for "if God be glorified in Him (Christ), God shall also glorify Him in Himself" (John 13:32); and God's righteousness was also seen in the glorifying of the Lord Jesus. Hence the Lord said that the Comforter would reprove the world of sin, of *righteousness*, and of judgment; "of righteousness because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more (John 16:10). *God's righteousness then, in this aspect, is Christ received up into glory at His right hand.*"

We shall now be in a position to understand another aspect of the truth. In the second epistle to the Corinthians, believers are said to be made the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). Here we have the additional thought of union with Christ as before God. That is:

God righteously receives us into His glory as He has received Christ; for He has received Him *in virtue of the work done for us* -- us, therefore, in Him. We are made the righteousness of God in Him; for in blessing us in this heavenly and glorious way, in justifying us, He only gives its due effect to Christ's claims upon Him. Towards us it is pure grace, but it is equally the righteousness of God. He has been made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."⁵

Such is the true doctrine of justification. The foundation on which God acts is not the law-obedience of Christ, *and* the blood; *but it is the precious blood of Christ alone*. The righteousness of God is not the living obedience of Christ; but it is the response of God to the value of that precious blood -- it being so precious in the eyes of God that it constitutes, in His grace, a claim upon Him to justify every one who believes in Jesus. That righteousness was first displayed in the resurrection of Christ (for He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification), and in setting Him in glory at His own right hand; it is afresh displayed in the justification of every poor sinner who comes to Christ; and it will be furthermore displayed in glorifying every believer together with Christ. Hence too we can say that Christ is of God made unto us righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30); and that He is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth (Rom. 10:4); for all that we have from God -- our justification, our glorification -- is in Christ, and in Christ alone.

3. We need hardly, in this place, point out that the principle of justification is *faith* -- faith in contrast with, in opposition to, works. For there is no

5. *Collected Writings of J. N. Darby.*

controversy with "evangelical" Christians on this head. But we may again call your attention to the fact that Abraham's justification is given as the pattern of this principle (Rom. 4; Gal. 3). There is indeed one blessed difference; for the object proposed to Abraham for faith was a God of promise; whereas to us it is a *God of accomplishment*. "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it (righteousness) was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification. Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 4:23-25; 5:1).

The Believer's Standing in Christ.

Permit me now to call your attention to the believer's standing. Fewer words will be necessary on this subject; but I am anxious to place it before you, because, until it is understood, there can be no due appreciation either of our relationships or responsibilities. Indeed it would not be too much to say that much of the feebleness of the Christian life, and much of the uncertainty of walk, and the want of separation from the world, which are so often deplored in professing Christians, may be traced to an imperfect knowledge of the position which the believer occupies before God in Christ.

To begin then at the beginning. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). That is, peace with God is the inalienable inheritance of every one who is justified; for it is the peace which has been made "through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20). It is not therefore experience or attainment which is spoken of; but that which belongs to every believer, whatever his feelings, the moment he is justified. And consequently, if we do not enter into the enjoyment of this peace, it is owing to our insufficient acquaintance with the grace of God, through, it may be, bad teaching or unbelief. But it is of the first importance that every believer, whatever his feebleness or timidity, should know that everlasting peace with God is his portion through the precious blood of Christ.

There is however more than this. We read on: "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." Again, be it observed, this is not experience, but the position into which every believer is brought in Christ Jesus -- a position of perfect acceptance, in which the full favor of God rests on him; not on account of what he is in himself, or of any experience which he may have, or of any attainment he has made, but solely on account of what Christ is and has done on his behalf.

If I refer you to another passage, this truth will be more distinctly apprehended. Turning then to the epistle the Colossians, we read, "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in (your) mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death; to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight," etc. (Col. 1:21, 22). Now, mark two things.

- First, that God had reconciled these believers ("And you *hath* He reconciled," etc.);
- and secondly, that we have three words to indicate the perfect character of this reconciliation.

(1) The first is "holy" -- a word that expresses in the strongest possible way the perfect meetness of the believer for the holy presence of God.

(2) Then we have "unblameable" -- a word which will be best understood by a reference to another passage. In Hebrews we read, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself *without spot* to God," etc. (Heb. 9:14). The word here

translated, "without spot," is the same as "unblameable" in the Colossians; and hence we gather that the believer, as to standing, is before God what Christ was in His offering up of Himself; viz., without spot.

(3) Lastly we have "unreproveable" -- more exactly, "without charge," or "accusation"; i.e. one against whom no charge can be brought, according to the apostle's words elsewhere -- "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" (Rom. 8:33).

Combining then these three expressions, we are taught that, as to the believer's standing before God, it is absolutely perfect; for the words we have considered show that God regards His people in Christ as holy, without spot, and with every question that might have been raised against them so completely settled, that no possible accusation against them can be substantiated. And remember that this standing is that of every believer; that it is not at all a matter of experience or attainment, but it belongs to the babe in Christ, as well as to the young men and fathers; because indeed as soon as we believe we stand before God in all the perfectness, fragrance, and acceptance of Christ. It is therefore what He is, and not what we are; and what He is, so are we in Him before God.

But we may go farther. In the epistle to the Romans we read, "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." (Rom. 8:9). These words must be very carefully noted. "Ye are *not in the flesh*," etc. What then is this reference? It is to the believer's standing, the result of his death and resurrection with Christ. Thus, if you will attentively read from Rom. 6, you will find that believers are regarded as having died as to their old nature⁶ with Christ. Take one or two passages: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?" (Rom. 6:3); "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him" (Rom. 6:6); "Now if we be dead with Christ," etc. (Rom. 6:8). As we learn elsewhere also, they are regarded as "risen with Christ" (Col. 3:1); and hence believers are reminded that they "*have* put off the old man with his deeds; and *have* put on the new," etc. (Col. 3:9, 10). The truth taught then is that, as to our standing before God, we are not in the flesh, because our old man was judged and crucified on the cross, but we are in the Spirit. That is, it is the Spirit that characterizes our position before God. In His sight and before Him we are not in the flesh. This indeed supposes the existence of the flesh; but having received the Holy Ghost, and having life of the Holy Ghost, it is *He* who constitutes our link with God. Our moral existence before God is in the Spirit, not in the flesh, or natural {fallen} man. In other words, we are, as to standing, not in Adam at all (and going beyond the passage just considered, we may add), but in Christ, and in Christ where He is.

We may support these statements by one or two more passages. In the Ephesians we find as follows: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened

6. {The writer is not intending to teach that the old nature is gone. It would have been better to say "old man" -- which refers to the sinner's standing in the first Adam.}

us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4-6). All these verbs are in the past tense -- God *hath* quickened, *hath* raised us up together, and *made* us sit together; and therefore we are here directed to something which has been accomplished on our behalf. And what is this? Our perfect standing in Christ. Yea, we are taught that already in Christ we are seated in the heavenly places, and that this is our true place before God. If we were in the flesh, this scene in which we move would be our place; but because in Christ we have died out of it, and have been raised up together with Christ, our true place is in Christ where He is -- in the heavenly places. It is on this account that the apostle says elsewhere, "If any man be in Christ, a new creature [creation]" (2 Cor. 5:17. Read the context). For we have died in Christ to the old, have been brought clean out of it, and have risen with Him into the new creation, where everything is perfect according to the perfectness of God. Hence the apostle John is able to say, "As He is, so are we in this world"; i.e. as Christ is before God, so are we in Him, though in this world, as perfectly accepted, because His acceptance is ours.

"So near, so very near to God,
I cannot nearer be;
For in the person of His Son
I am as near as He."

You will bear in mind that I have been dealing with the standing of the believer. Of course our place of service is here in the wilderness; but while this is true, let us never forget that we belong to another creation than this, because we are seated in Christ in the heavenly places. "Our citizenship is in heaven, whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20); and when He comes He will receive us unto Himself, that where He is we -- then made like unto Him, conformed to Him in the glory -- may be also.

I am the more anxious that you should fully apprehend these truths because of their designed influence upon our walk and conversation. Once see that we are a heavenly people, and you will also perceive that our true place and standing before God should determine the character of our walk; that, in a word, our walk should be in correspondence with our position in Christ; that separation must be written upon all that we are, and upon all that we do -- separation unto God. If believers were more familiar with the character of their standing, they would see the utter incongruity of many of their associations; they could not have fellowship with the men of the world in politics, and so-called philanthropic movements -- with so many things, in short, which grieve the Spirit of God; but they would enter into the language of the apostle, "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more" (2 Cor. 5:16); they would understand his appeal, Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship bath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty "

(2 Cor. 6:14-18); and they would seek grace day by day to comply with the exhortation, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:1-3).

The Rule of Life

Much discussion has been raised on the question, What is the rule of life for the believer? It is commonly said that the law is; and "Brethren" have incurred no little obloquy and misrepresentation by venturing to dissent from this statement. They dissent from it, because they maintain that the standard of God's requirements from Israel in the flesh is not the standard which He sets before those who are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, as we saw in the last letter {last article} -- because, in a word, they do not find it so represented in the word of God. It is sometimes said, because we do not accept the law as the rule of life, that we are Antinomians, desiring to free ourselves from all obligation and restraint. But, as I hope to show, in taking this ground we contend that the law is an inadequate expression of what God now expects from believers; that God has brought His people into far closer relationships than that would imply, and, therefore, under higher, deeper, and broader obligations. The law indeed finds its sphere of operation on the earth; but it cannot enter into those heavenly places in which we are seated in Christ {Eph. 2:6}.

We propose then to deal with the subject under two questions: Is the law the rule of life? and if not, what is the rule of life for the believer? In dealing with them, I feel compelled to remind you that they must be answered neither by human opinions, nor by theological teachings, but solely by the word of God.

Is the law the rule of life for the believer? To this question I will select three answers, out of many which are furnished by the scriptures. In the first place, I find that the apostle Paul represents, in the most emphatic manner, that we are brought out altogether from under the law. Turn with me to Rom. 7:4. There we read: "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (read the whole paragraph). This is simple enough; for the question raised is this: Is the law our husband, or is Christ? It is perfectly impossible, from the contrast drawn, that it can mean that we are dead to the condemnation of the law, for the question is as to bringing forth fruit. The truth then insisted on is, that since we died in Christ our substitute, we died clean out from under the law, out indeed of the sphere of the flesh in which the law had its operation, and are united to Him in resurrection, where He is, as our only Lord. Some of you however may say, Read on; and does not the close of the chapter teach us another thing? My answer is, Read on still, out of the seventh into the eighth, and then you will see that we get exactly the same truth. But we will examine the matter a little more closely.

No one disputes the application of the first part of the apostle's argument. The paragraph comprised in Rom. 7:7-12 describes the effect of the application of the law to man in the flesh. The apostle commences with the question, "Is the law sin?" (v. 7); and he shows that, while by the law is the knowledge of sin, "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (v. 12). He then raises another question, "Was then that which is good made death unto me?" (v. 13). And in answer to this question, he brings out *the effect of the application of the law to regenerate man* (using the first person, it may be, as an illustration), *who, as yet, was ignorant of full redemption in Christ*. And what is the effect produced? Irreconcilable conflict -- a conflict which reveals the presence of sin as still in the regenerate man (v. 17); the utter corruption of the flesh (v. 18); and his utter helplessness in himself, because of the two antagonistic natures ever at conflict within him (vv. 18-20). Where then shall he find deliverance? For the misery to which he is reduced constrains him to cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24). Then comes the full and complete answer, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord (v. 25); i.e. I thank God that I am delivered through Jesus Christ, etc.; and then, in Rom. 8 follows the exposition of the blessed deliverance and liberty which we have in Christ, in the course of which the apostle teaches us that "ye are *not in the flesh* (i.e. before God) but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you" (v. 9). The deliverance is therefore so full and entire, that the flesh is regarded by God as done away with in Christ, and this in virtue of the fact (as we are taught in another place) that the believer has been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20; see especially also Rom. 6:6).

A right conception then of Rom. 7 teaches most unmistakably that we are not under law. I know that there are many who believe that it contains the proper experience of the Christian; but let me ask whether such an expression as this, "I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14), or this again, already cited, "O wretched man that I am!" etc. (Rom. 7:24), should be taken as the proper language of one who knows his full, perfect, and everlasting salvation in Christ? Or whether such expressions harmonize with the exultant cry of the apostle at the close of Rom. 8, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (v. 35). The very supposition is monstrous, and can only proceed upon the most entire ignorance of the nature of redemption, and of the believer's true standing through his death and resurrection in Christ.

One passage more shall be cited under this head, to substantiate the conclusion already reached. In describing how he became all things to all men, the apostle says that he became "to them that are under the law, as under the law," and then adds (in a clause omitted from the received text, but

acknowledged by all competent to form a judgment as genuine), "*not being myself under law*," an assertion which is implied in the next verse for he proceeds, "To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,)" -- "under the law to Christ" being a very different phrase from the usual term "under the law." It is, in fact ἔννομος χριστῶ; translated by some, "enlawed to Christ"; by others, "legitimately subject to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21). Be this as it may, it is very evident that the apostle here insists upon his entire freedom from the law; and here insists upon his entire freedom from the law; and that, if he were under the law as his rule of life, he could not have used the language we have discussed.

Secondly, the law cannot be the rule of life to the believer, because the obligations under which he is placed *go beyond the requirements of law*. The apostle John says: "Hereby perceive we the love" (not the love of God, as in our translation, but love in its true nature or character), "because HE laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). Now the utmost the law requires of us is to love our neighbor as ourselves; and hence Paley justifies killing a man in self-defence; for as he argues, if we allow him to kill us rather than kill him, we shall be loving him better than ourselves, and this is to go beyond, as he says, the divine command. Since therefore we have here the plain direction to lay down our lives for the brethren, if the need arises, and the law nowhere even by implication requires this from us, it is evident that the law is not a perfect rule for us, and hence cannot be *the* rule of life.

Last of all, I ask you to consider the nature of the law. It was, as we have before seen when dealing with justification, the standard of human righteousness, given to Israel after the flesh, i.e. to natural men. But if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, or rather, a new creation; he is not in the flesh, but in the Spirit before God (2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 8:9); and as such he is responsible to walk before God according to the place in which he is set, according to his standing as a risen man in Christ, in the power of the Spirit. (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:25). While therefore the law is a perfect standard of God's requirements from men in the flesh, it is on this very account inapplicable to those who are regenerate, and indwelt by the Spirit of God. Like all God's words and works, it is perfect -- "holy, and just, and good"; but if applied to those for whom God did not intend it, you introduce confusion, and mar its perfectness, by seeking to enjoin it on those who have been brought out from under it through the death and resurrection of Christ.

2. What then, we ask, is the rule of life? The answer is contained in one word, *It is Christ*. This will be seen from the following passages: "He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also to walk, even as HE walked" (1 John 2:6);

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21); "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus" (not the Author and Finisher of *our* faith, but) the leader (the same word as that translated "Prince" in Acts 3:15; 5:31, and "Captain" in Heb. 2:10) and the Completer of faith; i.e. looking unto Jesus as the Perfect Example of the life of faith from its commencement unto its completion {see also Gal. 6:2 and 15, 16}.

These passages will suffice (although they might be largely multiplied) to show that Christ, and not the law, is the rule of life. And in saying this, it will be at once seen that we make far larger demands upon the believer than if we said he was under law; for Christ fulfilled every jot and title of the moral law, and went far beyond it in His death upon the cross. Hence we cannot slight a single moral precept, whether, as another has said, it be in the Ten Commandments or anywhere else; for we find all God's expressed will fully and perfectly embodied in the life of the Lord Jesus. Hence, too, we find in the epistles the law frequently cited as an illustration of some branch of Christian obligation, but always in connection with Christ (see Rom. 13:7-14).

I might dilate upon the spiritual advantages of having Christ, rather than the law, as the rule of life; for thereby our eyes are ever directed to Him, that, in the power of the Spirit, we might copy His example, and walk as He walked. And thus we have but one object for the soul -- Christ, Christ in glory -- as that to which we are to be conformed, morally, in ever increasing measure now (2 Cor. 3:18), and absolutely when He returns to receive us unto Himself (Phil. 3:20, 21; 1 John 3:2). You will therefore see that, so far from lessening, we rather seek to enhance the obligations of the believer; and that we do this *by placing him always in the presence of Christ*, so that he may be fully and always under the constraining influence of His love (see 2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

I do not think that you will object to, nay, I believe that you will heartily receive, the doctrine as here propounded, that Christ is our rule of life. Still I want to point out, as an additional aid, how impossible it is to prove from the Scriptures that the law has this place for the Christian. To give you an instance of this, I will cite from an article which appeared in the *Christian Armour* for 1874. The article is written by a clergyman well known in evangelical circles, and also, I may add, by "Brethren." He contends that the whole moral law is reenacted in the gospel, and hence that it, and nothing else, is our rule of life. Take the following -- quoted literally -- as a specimen of his dealing with the word of God, and then judge the force of his reasonings. The commandment cited and placed in the first column is, as you will perceive, the fourth; and in the second column, you have the supposed proofs of its reenactment in the New

Testament.

THE LAW

"Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8).

THE GOSPEL

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10).

"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store" (1 Cor. 16: 2).

"The same day at evening being the first day of the week (John 20:19).

"After eight days again came Jesus" (John 20:26).

"Trucebreakers" (2 Tim. 3:3).

"They returned, and rested the Sabbath-day according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56).

Now, to say nothing of the confusion of the quotations, you will remark that four out of the six refer *to the first day of the week* and *not* to the Sabbath, or seventh day; that one refers to neither; and that the remaining one refers to the Sabbath, as kept by Jews before Pentecost. This is very sad, as illustrating the shifts to which even pious men are reduced when they seek to uphold a system instead of learning from the word of God. And I might ask, Did you ever meet with any one who even endeavored to keep the Sabbath as enjoined upon the Jews? If not, who gave them liberty, if, as they contend, they are still under the law, to dispense with a single portion of God's requirements? Either therefore they do not believe what they teach, or they are content with a bad conscience; and a bad conscience destroys communion, and where there is no communion with God there is no spiritual power. And be sure that the soul that does not feel the constraining love of Christ (and the power of that love will be felt just in proportion as the heart is occupied with Him) will never feel the obligation of the law. Let us therefore seek grace to say with the apostle, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

The Church -- What is It?

The question which I desire to consider with you in this letter is that of the church. Perhaps this is the most important subject for believers at the present time, both on account of its intrinsic character, and also on account of the confusion -- not to say ignorance -- that prevails on this point in Christendom. A Catholic will of course tell you that the church is the Church of Rome; but many Episcopalians would equally identify it with the Establishment, which is indeed termed *the Church of England*; Dissenters will tell you that while the church composes all believers of all times, they are yet members of the church meeting at Blackheath Chapel, or, to increase the confusion, at Brownford Congregational *Church*; whereas Wesleyans will modestly say that they are members of the *Society*, etc. Now if we do not know what the church is, we cannot know the privileges which attach to our belonging to it; and hence we desire to ask, *What is the church?*

1. In the first place, it is material to notice that the church in the sense, under discussion, of the body of Christ is not found in the Old Testament. This statement is often denied on the ground of a single passage in the Acts of the Apostles, which it is therefore incumbent upon us carefully to examine. In the speech of Stephen, before the Sanhedrim, we find these words: "This is he that was in the church in the wilderness," etc. (Acts 7:38); and on these words the whole question turns, because there is not a single passage in the Old Testament Scriptures themselves which even hints at the existence of the church as known in the New Testament. Now we admit at once that the word "church" is that which is also used of the church of God, it is ἐκκλησία. But what does this word ἐκκλησία mean? It means simply an "assembly," leaving the nature of the assembly to be defined by the context. For example, the same word is applied three times to the tumultuous gathering at Ephesus, which was brought together through the action of Demetrius the silversmith, and his fellow-tradesmen (Acts 19:32, 39, 41); and here, in each instance, it is translated assembly. What then, we ask, was the assembly in the wilderness? The answer is plain, it was the congregation of Israel. But was this congregation the church of God? Impossible; for while there were men born of God amongst that congregation, the congregation was composed of the nation of Israel after the flesh, so that every child born of the Jews was, by virtue of his birth, a member of it. If therefore it is contended that this was the church of God, the inference which meets us is that the church of God in the wilderness was composed of men after the flesh; for the new birth clearly had nothing whatever to do with forming its members, inasmuch as the whole nation was included. So stated, every instructed Christian will at once perceive that the assembly or congregation of Israel was not, in any sense, the church according to the New Testament Scriptures.

2. Another important point is, that the church is not seen as existent in the Gospels. Indeed the word is only found three times in Matthew, and not at all in the other evangelists. We have only then to examine the places where it occurs in the first Gospel. The first passage in which it occurs is as follows: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church," etc. (Matt. 16:18).

Now mark the language employed by our Lord. He says, Upon this rock I WILL build my church," speaking in the future tense of something which had not yet begun to be, but which He was going to build. Such language would have been impossible had the church been at that time in existence, and reveals, as plainly as words could reveal, that the commencement of the church was at that time a yet future thing. The only other passage (for the word occurs twice in it) is Matt. 18:17, containing instruction as to how we should deal with a brother who should trespass against us. But the very place of this instruction, coming as it does after the revelation of the future building of the church, and bound up with church or corporate action, as it is in the context, explains its significance, especially if we are careful to note that the Lord concludes this instruction with the especial promise of being in their midst when they should be gathered together *unto His name*, {Matt. 18:20} a thing that could not take place as long as He was present with them. The church therefore is no more found in the Gospels than it is in the Old Testament Scriptures.

3. It is not until we come to the Acts of the Apostles that we find it actually existent. And accordingly, the word, either in the singular or plural, is now found no less than twenty or twenty-one times (I say, or twenty-one, for Acts 2:47 is, to say the least, doubtful); and the thing signified by the word -- the assembly of God -- is met with almost in every chapter. When then, we ask, did the church commence its existence? Or rather, When did the Lord Jesus commence to build His church on the rock of which He had spoken? *It was on the day of Pentecost*, and not before, that those who received the apostles' words, and who were baptized, were built upon the Rock; and, being baptized by one Spirit into one body, became the church of God. I will not dwell farther on this point now, as successive proofs of this will appear as we proceed.

4. Let us then now answer distinctly from the Scriptures our question, *What is the church?* We have a twofold reply. It is the body of Christ, and it is the house of God. Thus, in Ephesians, after the apostle has spoken of the display of the mighty power of God in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and His supreme exaltation, he proceeds, "But gave Him to be head over all things to the church, *which is His body*, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:20-23. See also Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 10:16, 17; 12:27; Eph. 2:16; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:30; Col. 1:18-24; 2:19). And in the epistle to Timothy we read of "*the house of God, which is the church of the living God*" (1 Tim. 3:15); and in Ephesians, "In whom ye also are built together for an *habitation of God through the Spirit*." (Eph. 2:22. See also Heb. 3:6; 10:21; 1 Peter 2:5; 4:17; also 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16, etc.). If you will be at the pains to search out the several passages given, you will see that these are the two characteristics of the church as presented in the word of God.

I shall not at this time point out the distinction between the "house" and the "body," as it would lead us too far away from the subject in hand; ⁷ but I shall now seek to show that these two terms conclusively prove the statements already made as to the time of the commencement of the church. Thus take the term

7. {Ed. Dennett's, *The House of God: Traced Through Scripture*, is available from the publisher.}

"body." The church, as we have seen, is the body of Christ; and if so, as indeed is also stated (Col. 1:18), Christ is the head of the body. Consequently it was not until after the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus that the Head was in heaven, and the body could be formed; for while in the flesh the Lord Jesus abode alone, union with Him being only possible in resurrection. (John 12:23, 24).

Again, let me ask, How is {was} the body formed? "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body," etc. (1 Cor. 12:13). But "the Holy Ghost was not yet [given], because that Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39); and hence, until Jesus was glorified, the Spirit was not down here on earth to baptize believers into one body, and thus we see again that the church could not be formed until on and after Pentecost. Once more, let me remind you that the characteristic of the body is, that all national distinctions are abrogated, that it is composed alike of Jews and Gentiles (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:13-16; Col. 3:10, 11); but up to the crucifixion of Christ the Jewish nation possessed its special and peculiar privileges, and we are expressly told in the Ephesians that these national distinctions were abolished through His death. The apostle says, "For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition [between us]: having abolished in His flesh the enmity, [even] the law of the commandments [contained] in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, [so] making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross," etc. (Eph. 2:14-16). Finally, we are expressly told that the mystery of the body was not revealed until after Pentecost -- until, in fact, the time of the apostle Paul (Rom. 16:25, 26; Eph. 3:2-11; Col. 1:25-28).

The same result will be reached if we consider the term house -- the church, as the house of God. Thus in Eph. 2:20 we are told that believers "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets." Are these the prophets of the Old Testament, or of the New? The order of the words has surely special significance; or if not, turn with me to Eph. 4, where we have an enumeration of gifts that proceeded from the *ascended* Christ. "He gave some," it is said, "apostles, and some prophets," etc. (v. 11); and thus the question is settled (for it is the same order of words), that they are New Testament prophets, and consequently the church was not built upon this foundation until after Pentecost. Another consideration (I hope you will not be wearied with the abundance of proofs) points exactly the same way. As the house, the church is the habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:22); and as we have seen, the Spirit was not given until Pentecost {Acts 1:4; 2:33}; and therefore God could not have had His habitation through the Spirit in the church before that time. God indeed dwelt in the tabernacle of witness and in the temple both of which were doubtless shadows of His temple in the church; but just because they were shadows or types, it proves that the thing adumbrated or typified was not yet existent.

It is therefore abundantly plain -- as all the different lines of argument we have adduced from the Scriptures show -- that the church of God had its commencement here on earth on the day of Pentecost. But the church is also the bride of Christ (see Eph. 5:23-33; 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:6-9; 21:2-9, etc.), and hence the church must be complete when "the marriage of the Lamb" takes

place. Now it is seen from Rev. 19 that this event will occur previous to the Lord's appearing -- to His coming to the earth to establish His kingdom (vv. 6-9), and we know from manifold Scriptures (e.g. 2 Thess. 1; Col. 3:1-4; Rom. 8:16-21; 1 Thess. 4:13-18, etc.) that the hope of the church is the coming of the Lord, that having suffered with Christ she will be glorified and reign together with Him in His kingdom. Hence *the period of the church extends from Pentecost until the Lord's coming for His saints*; and consequently the church of God comprises all believers during that period -- all those believers therefore who have been indwelt by the Holy Ghost, baptized by Him into one body, and united therefore by Him to the glorified man, Christ Jesus, as their Head in heaven.

Such is the answer which the word of God supplies to the question, What is the church? And we are very sure that it is the only answer that can be found in the Scriptures.

Practical Aspects of the Unity of the Body of Christ

We have just seen that the church did not commence its existence until Pentecost, and that the duration of its existence on earth will extend until the coming of the Lord. With the question that may be raised respecting the saints of the Old Testament and the saints during the millennial period, I hope to deal in the next letter {next article}. I now wish you to consider with me some of the practical aspects of the unity of the body of Christ.

We concluded in our last that the body of Christ could not be formed until Christ, as its glorified Head, was in heaven. How indeed was the body formed? The answer is found in the words already cited: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13), showing, as we saw, that until the Holy Ghost was sent down {Acts 2:33}, consequent upon the glorification of Christ (John 7:39), the body of Christ could not be. But there is another thing that will strike the attentive reader of the New Testament, and that is, that no mention of the body of Christ is found except in the writings of the apostle Paul. He tells us indeed that he was specially commissioned to make it known (Eph. 3:2-7; Col. 1:25). The germ of the fuller revelation afterwards made was no doubt contained in the very first words which the Lord addressed to Saul; for when He appeared to him as he was on his way to Damascus, He said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou [not My people, but] ME?" (Acts 9:4). Here we get the perfect identification of Christ as the risen Head with His members on the earth, so that it was against Him really that the mad rage of Saul was directed. Accordingly, when the apostle brings out the truth of the body, he says, "As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is [not the church, but] CHRIST" (1 Cor. 12:12); i.e. he expresses, by the term Christ, Christ and His people on earth as indivisibly one.

The truth then taught is, that believers are baptized by one Spirit into living union with Christ, so that Christ and all His people on earth form one vital body; and hence it is that believers are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones -- words which indicate in the strongest possible way the living organic union of believers (as wrought and maintained by the Holy Ghost) with Christ as their risen Head. Several very important consequences flow from this truth; and it is to these we now invite your prayerful attention as we point them out from the word of God.

1. Note that the believers in any given locality -- or rather the assembly of God in any given place -- is regarded as the expression of the body of Christ. Thus the apostle, writing to the Corinthians, after unfolding the practical aspects of the body of Christ, says: "Now ye are the ⁸ body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:27). This is a most important principle, and teaches most explicitly what is God's ground for the gathering together of His people -- that it is the ground of membership of the body of Christ; that is, in other words, if saints are gathered together on any foundation which does not admit of all the members of Christ in that place (excepting such as may be under scriptural discipline), ⁹ it is not God's ground. For example; if believers meet as Wesleyans, as Baptists, or as Presbyterians, they meet as being members of their respective denominations, and not as being members of Christ. But you may reply, "It is true that we are Baptists, etc.; but we have no sympathy whatever with those who exclude all others from fellowship; and, in fact, we admit all believers." That is to say, beloved friends, other believers are welcomed by you if they are willing to submit themselves to your views of truth, your views of "church" government, and to your methods of worship. If this be so, as I know it is with some of you, the case is not altered. It only proves that you have a little more liberality of feeling than many others; but it still remains true that you are not gathered on the ground of the body of Christ, that you are not gathered unto His name. For while you might tolerate those who rejected your peculiar views, you would not regard them as *bona fide* members, or permit them to minister in your meetings if they did not accept those views which so many Christians believe to be unscriptural. And this being so, your ground of meeting -- I desire to say it tenderly, though with all faithfulness -- is a denial of the unity of the body of Christ. If it were not so, membership of the body of Christ would be the only term of fellowship, and Christ's name the only center of your gathering; and then you would view with grief the name "Congregational," "Baptist," or "Presbyterian," written up outside your chapels; because you would feel that there might be many dear children of God, members of Christ, who, not agreeing with the views indicated by these names, might be shut out from fellowship by these denominational signs.

2. If gathered as members of the body of Christ, room must be left for the exercise of the gifts of the members. This is the evident scope of the apostle's argument in 1 Cor. 12, which you will do well to read attentively and compare

8. {The word "the" is not present in the Greek text. The force of the Apostle's statement is that they had body character -- not that each assembly is a body of Christ.}

9. {Of course that is not all. Persons who fellowship moral or doctrinal evil, who are leavened in their fellowship, are to be refused, as are those who come asserting their "rights," and their self-will.}

with existing practices. Thus the apostle says, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, . . . and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many" (1 Cor. 12:12-14). He then points out that no member can be separated from the body in which it is found; that each is necessary for the welfare of all the rest, whether deemed "more feeble" or "comely"; for "God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked: that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another," etc. He then adds, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some ill the church" (assembly), "first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers," etc. (1 Cor. 12:15-28).

Such then being the character of the assembly as the body of Christ, composed of many members, and every member having a distinct office, and the activity of each being absolutely necessary for the welfare and blessing of the whole body, what is it but a denial of the unity of the body, as well as of the office and use of its several members, when meetings are placed under the presidency and guidance of one man? In fact, if you make one man, however gifted, the absolute mouthpiece of all, you must consciously or unconsciously ignore the common membership of the body of Christ on the part of believers. Suppose, now, I looked to my head or hand to perform all the functions of the body, it would be nothing less than folly. But the folly is still greater when you look to a "minister" to discharge all the functions of the body of Christ. I do not deny his gift, or gifts: he may be richly endowed; but he cannot perform the offices of all the members of the body who are there assembled, since all have gifts differing according to the grace given. This is evident; and therefore until room is left in your meetings, for the exercise of whatever gift the Lord has been pleased to bestow upon the different members of His body, you cannot even claim to be gathered on that ground.

Not only so, but you really place yourselves in opposition to the Lord's command. In Rom. 12 the apostle exhorts us by the Spirit, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry {service}, let us wait on our ministering" (Rom. 12:6, 7); and he grounds this exhortation upon the fact, that "as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (vv. 4, 5). It is a very grave matter therefore, if by human arrangements you refuse to allow the exercise of the gift of the several members. It amounts to no less than actual disobedience to the Lord as Head of the

church; and at the same time, it is quenching the Spirit.

Nor is the offence less serious if we consider it in the light of another Scripture. We find in the epistle to the Ephesians that on His ascension the Lord Jesus gave gifts unto men, and after their enumeration (Eph. 4:11) we are told that they are given "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," etc. (v. 11). If therefore you were gathered on the ground of the body of Christ, how jealous you would be over the least departure from these instructions; and how jealously you would remove every obstruction to the realization of the provision which has thus been made for the edification of the body of Christ!

3. Another important truth is taught by the apostle in 1 Cor. 10. He says: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? *For we [being] many are one bread, one body:* for we are all partakers of that one bread," or loaf (1 Cor. 10:16, 17). We are here told that the "one bread," or "loaf," is a symbol of the unity of the body of Christ; and this unity is also set forth by the fact that all (the members of Christ forming the assembly) are partakers (when gathered together) of that one bread or loaf. Hence the purpose of the gathering together was to "break bread," to "show the Lord's death till He come," (1 Cor. 11:26); and consequently, when *gathered according to the mind of God as members of Christ, it should be around the table of the Lord in obedience to His command*, where, in addition to remembering Christ, we have before us the bread which reminds us on the one hand of His broken body; and on the other of the unity of His body -- the church. Accordingly we find that when the early disciples came together on the first day of the week, it was to break bread (Acts 20:7); for they were mindful both of the commandment of the Lord, and of the fact that they were members of the body of Christ.

But what, let me affectionately ask you, is the object of your assembly on the first day of the week? It is not to break bread, because you only do this once a month, or at the most twice in the month; and on these occasions it is not the object of your coming together, because the breaking of bread at the Lord's Supper is postponed until the end of the regular service, and is quite subordinate to it which has gone before. This proves conclusively at the end you have in view in coming together is mainly to hear the sermon. Do not mistake me. I by no means dispute the fact that many of you, *as individuals* come to worship; but still the prominent thing is the sermon; and hence the frequent question, Whom do you hear? or, Who is your minister? or, Had you a good sermon? That you often obtain blessing in this way cannot be denied; still it is certain, that, as long as you are not gathered unto the name of Christ around His table, you are not gathered as the members of the body of Christ, and consequently not

gathered Scripturally, i.e. according to the mind and will of God.

4. Combining these things together, it is very clear that as long as Christians are content to be "members of churches" (*concerning which nothing is said in the scriptures*) -- all of which are distinct one from another -- belonging to different denominations, having no connection with the other, beyond by occasional Christian courtesies recognizing each other as belonging to Christ, worshipping in different places in diverse forms and methods, and having different terms of fellowship, they cannot be meeting as members of the body of Christ, or be endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:3). For since all believers are members of the body of Christ, and the assembly of believers in any one place is the expression of the body (1 Cor. 12:27), any ground of meeting which does not admit all the members of the body simply as members of Christ (excepting those under scriptural discipline)¹⁰ is not the ground of the church of God. In other words, if any thing is demanded beyond being a member of Christ, walking in holiness and truth; if any human names are adopted, be it Anglican, Presbyterian, Independent, or Baptist; if there be any center of gathering beyond the name of Christ; and if the gifts of the different members of the body be not recognized; or if their exercise be not permitted according to the scriptures; then that gathering where these things exist is not God's assembly but man's.

And you little know, beloved friends, what you lose by practically ignoring the unity of the body of Christ. The apostle writes: "Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it" {1 Cor. 12:26}. Suppose now a member of another church" in the same town fall into sin, what do you know of suffering with him? You will, no doubt, be affected by his sin if you hear of it; for if he is a member of Christ, the whole body must suffer loss; but what do you know of entering intelligently into his condition before the Lord, and seeking his restoration? Nothing; for, in fact, you may not have heard of his declension and fall; or if you have, you will not make prayer for him in your meetings, for he belongs to *another* "church." On the other hand, when you are gathered as members of the body, the sin of one is *felt* to be the sin of all. Thus I have seen a whole assembly, in this neighborhood, on their faces before the Lord on account of the sin of a believer in a distant part of London; and it would be impossible to describe the blessedness of this practical realization of suffering with another member of the body of Christ. The unity of the body of Christ is thus a real thing, and apprehended in the power of the Spirit. . . .

10. {See note nine.}

Old Testament Saints

According to promise, I propose now to take up the question of the Old Testament saints. In point of fact, if the church was not formed until Pentecost, and is completed at the coming of the Lord, the millennial saints will also be outside the church. But as all the feeling is shown on the subject of the Old Testament class, and the principle is the same in both cases, we will confine our attention mainly to these.

That Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, all the saints under the old dispensation, were quickened, devoted servants of God, and that they will share in the first resurrection, with all the believers of this dispensation, at the coming of Christ, every instructed saint will at once admit, because this much is plain from the word of God. But we dare not go beyond the word; and if God has concealed from us the place in the glory which these eminent servants of His will occupy, it is the part of piety to bow in submission, to reverence His silence, as well as His word. Moreover, it savors not only of insubmission and irreverence, but it derogates also from the sufferings of Christ, and from the grace and work of the Spirit, to maintain that the saints who lived before the atonement was completed, and before the descent of the Holy Ghost, and who consequently had not the indwelling Spirit, are in precisely the same position as those who live now. Besides, I hope to show you that the scriptures themselves make a distinction; and if so, the difficulty ought at once to be removed.

I will cite, in the first place, Matt. 11:11, where we read: "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." It would lead us away from our object to enter here upon a full exposition of this passage, and hence I will content myself with calling your attention to the fact that the Lord tells us, that eminent as John the Baptist was in the position assigned him by God, as the forerunner of and the testifier to the coming Messiah, the very least in the kingdom of heaven is greater. Be the difference what it may -- a dispensational difference, no doubt -- the Lord Jesus does here make a distinction between saints; and not only so, but in this distinction He contrasts one of the least in the coming kingdom with one of the greatest before that time, and to the advantage of the former.

Secondly, let us turn to Rom. 3:25, 26: "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth [to be] a propitiation through faith in His blood, *to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God*; to declare [I say] at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Now, mark at the very outset that the word "remission" in the text is given as "passing over" in the margin, and this is the correct translation; and this word is never used of the forgiveness of sins in connection with faith in Christ; indeed it is not elsewhere found in the New Testament, and means, as explained in the margin, a passing by, or pretermission. It is *πάρεσις*. Bearing this in mind, you will perceive that we have a contrast between the position of the Old Testament saints as to the forgiveness of sins, and the position of believers since the death of Christ. In

the former case, their sins were passed over, or pretermitted, *through the forbearance of God*; in the latter, God is said to be *just and the justifier* of him which believeth in Jesus. Surely this is a plain distinction between Old Testament saints and believers of the present dispensation; for sins passed over through the forbearance of God, because of the coming sacrifice of Christ, can never express the condition of those who, "being justified by faith, have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1, 2); of those who are said to be seated "together in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 2:6); of those of whom the apostle John could say, "As *He is*, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17).

We pass on now to the Hebrews; and there we have these words: "These all" (the Old Testament saints), "having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided *some better thing for us*, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:39, 40). Here also we have a statement, as plain as language can make it, that believers in the present dispensation receive some "better thing" than fell, in the sovereignty and grace of God, to the Old Testament believers.

Having called your attention to these direct teachings of Scripture, I will now adduce another class of passages, in which we shall find saints in a perfected condition, but *outside the church*. The only thing I need to premise is, that the church is the bride of Christ. All, I should suppose, are agreed as to this. Let us then turn to Rev. 19. In the 7th and 8th verses we have the wife of the Lamb; and then, in the 9th, follow these words: "Blessed are they which are called" (or invited; see John 2:2) "unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." Thus we have a class spoken of who are invited; not the wife, but the called -- those who were guests at the marriage supper.

Turn again to Rev. 21:2, 3: "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them," etc. In the 9th verse, this city, the holy Jerusalem, is said to be "the bride, the Lamb's wife"; but in the above passage it is described also as "the tabernacle of God," and this tabernacle is said to be with men; so that once more we have saints in a perfected condition outside the church.

And I would also remind you, that you have for some years professed to hold the premillennial coming of the Lord Jesus. If you do still, then of necessity, since the church is completed at the coming of Christ for His people (for the marriage of the Lamb is previous to the millennial reign), the millennial saints -- innumerable for multitude -- do not form part of the church; and so, in any case, a large class on your own ground is excluded. There is no more "injustice," therefore, done to the Old Testament saints than to the millennial believers, when the proper position and privileges of the church are maintained.

The subject however would not be completely discussed, if we did not refer to some two or three passages which might, at first sight, seem to have an opposite bearing. The first of these is Matt. 8:11, 12: "And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and

Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness," etc. In the first place, if this did refer to the church, sitting down with the patriarchs in the kingdom of heaven does not prove that the patriarchs belonged to the church. No one, we suppose, doubts that believers will see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom; the only question is, Are they of the church? But it is evident that this passage says nothing of the church. If so, how could "the children of the kingdom" be cast out? No, Jesus speaks as the Messiah, and in this character He warns the unbelieving Jews, that their descent from the patriarchs will avail them nothing; that, though they were the children of those to whom the promises were made, they would, if they rejected Him, be cast out, and that, just as the centurion, whose servant He had healed, had pressed by faith into the possession of blessing, so should numbers from all quarters press into the kingdom when it should be set up, and should thus obtain, by faith, the blessed privilege which they were now despising.

The only other passage which occasions any difficulty is in the epistle to the Galatians. It is as follows: "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham" (Gal. 3:9). The theme of the apostle in this chapter is justification by faith; and he shows, first, that Abraham was justified by faith (v. 6); and then, that the same principle obtains under the gospel, and consequently that every one who is of faith is blessed with faithful, believing, Abraham (see also Rom. 4). The question therefore dealt with is *the principle on which God justifies, not the position into which the justified are brought*; and hence this passage does not go farther than teach, that the mode in which Abraham was justified is that in which believers now are justified; and therefore it does not touch upon dispensational differences of any kind.

Having thus passed, though briefly, the whole subject in review, we see that the Scriptures say nothing as to the inclusion of the Old Testament saints in the church; and that the Scriptures themselves make a plain distinction between the saints of the two dispensations. At the same time, we repeat that, since we know they were born of God, quickened by the power of the Spirit through faith, they belong to Christ, though not members of His body, and will, therefore, share in the first resurrection together with the church. Beyond this we may not go, as the Scriptures are silent as to the place in the glory they will occupy; and I am sure that you, equally with myself, would be the first to reject such speculations as are sometimes offered upon the question as to whether some change might not be wrought upon the patriarchs' condition after the death of Christ, so as to bring them into the church; for, in truth, this is to fall, in principle, into the Popish error of purgatory, even though it be shorn of its grossest features. No; our part is to accept whatever the Scriptures may teach, and as implicitly to refuse any speculation which seeks to penetrate into the things which God has not revealed.

But since He has taught us that the period of the church is included between Pentecost and the coming of the Lord, we know that the believers before and the believers after that time cannot form part of it, cannot be members of the body of Christ. Their place and blessing in the glory will be worthy of Him who separated them unto Himself, and will call forth their adoration and praise, equally with ours, as they contemplate the wondrous display of the riches of His

grace in their salvation and eternal glory.

The question of the return of the Lord for His people is very closely connected with the true doctrine of the church. It is not indeed too much to say, that whenever the nature of the church -- its character and heavenly calling -- is not clearly apprehended, there must of necessity follow confusion of perception and judgment concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus to receive His people unto Himself. It is this which accounts for the fact that so many unscriptural theories are afloat at the present time, making it all the more important that we should know what the Scriptures really teach on the subject.

But you will permit me to assume in this letter [this article] that the return of the Lord is premillennial. We have so often gone into this matter in years past, that I cannot bring myself to believe that it is necessary to restate the scriptural grounds of this elementary belief. Both the Old and the New Testaments teem with proofs of it, showing that when the Lord comes with His saints He will destroy Antichrist and his armies, and judge the living nations, before He commences that glorious reign wherein "He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth," and wherein "the whole earth shall be filled with His glory" (see Isa. 24-27, 52 and 60; Jer. 33; Zeph. 3; Zech. 12-14; 2 Thess. 2; Rev. 19-21:1-8, etc.). I give these scriptures in case any of you have wavered from your former views on this point; and having done so, I shall proceed to consider whether the Lord will return for His people before the unequalled tribulation of which we read in Matt. 24 and in the prophets (as, for example, Dan. 12:1; Jer. 30:7, etc.); in other words, whether the church will be in the tribulation; *i. e.*, in fact, *whether we may at any time expect the Lord's return.*

In order that there may be a perfect understanding of the subject to be discussed, I may add that it is contended by some that there are certain intervening events between the present time and the Lord's coming, such as the return of the Jews to their own land, the redivision of the nations of the old Roman empire into ten kingdoms, the rise and power of Antichrist, etc.; and hence that the hope of the Lord's return cannot be a present thing to the soul. In fact, those who hold this view regard the coming of the lord for His saints, and His coming to take to Himself His great power in His millennial kingdom, as coincident. The question therefore which we have to ask is, Which of these opposing views is according to the word of God?

1. Now the first thing I have to remark is, that since (as we saw in a former letter {former article}) the church is not found in the Old Testament, it is not there that we can discover its true and proper hope. The coming of the Lord to reign from mount Zion is there frequently spoken of (see Psa. 2); but this is always in connection with His ancient people, and forms indeed the distinctive hope of Israel. But nowhere in the Old Testament do we find a trace of the change of the living saints, the resurrection of those who have fallen asleep, and their common rapture to meet the Lord in the air, as taught by the apostle in 1 Thess. 4:13-18. Nay, how could it be so, when, as we learned, the mystery of the church, as the body of Christ, was not revealed until the time of the apostle Paul? {Rom. 16:26, 27; Col. 1:26; Eph. 3.} It is therefore exclusively to the New Testament that we must turn for light upon this subject.

2. We come then to the Gospels; and inasmuch as Matt. 24 has been largely used in this discussion, we will examine it patiently to see whether it does refer to the return of the Lord for the church. Let us turn to it; for very much turns upon our interpretation of our Lord's discourse to His disciples as there recorded. To raise the question then in the most distinct and simple form, we ask, Are we to understand that our Lord in this discourse speaks of His return to receive believers of this dispensation unto Himself? If He does, it is clear from Matt. 24:21, 22 that the church will be in the final tribulation, and consequently that we cannot expect the return of our Lord until after many intervening events. But if our Lord is here dealing with another subject, we have then full liberty to gather from other scriptures what is the truth connected with the coming of the Lord for His saints.

(1) The first point to which I call your attention is found in Matt. 24:5, 23 and 24:

Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many (v. 5). Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect (vv. 23, 24).

Now let me ask you, Supposing that any one at any time should go to a Christian and say, Christ is in such and such a place, could he be in this matter deceived? Does not every, even the most uninstructed, believer know where Christ is, that He is at the right hand of the Father in heaven? If, moreover, a man were to come amongst believers, doing great signs and wonders, and offering these in proof that he was Christ, would he succeed in deceiving the saints? Why, many scriptures would at once be present to their minds contradicting his claims, since all know that they will never see their Lord until either they depart to be with Him, or He comes to receive them unto Himself. On the other hand, suppose for an instant that such temptation were presented to the Jews who do not believe that their Messiah has ever come, and who are still expecting His advent, and you will see at once their immense liability to such deception. We cannot therefore but regard this description as applying to God's ancient people, and not to the church.

(2) Again, let us examine Matt. 24:15:

When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand;) then let them which be in Judaea, etc.

If you will turn to the place in Daniel referred to by our Lord, you will at once see that his prophecy refers wholly and exclusively to his own nation -- the Jews; and the very terms which our Lord here uses -- "the abomination of desolation" -- a well-known term for idols; and "the holy place," referring to the temple, show as conclusively that He is dealing with the same people -- describing their sorrows at the time of the end, when "there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation [even] to that same time" -- previous to the deliverance of the remnant -- "every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan. 12:1) when "the Redeemer shall come

to Zion" (Isa. 59:20; Zech. 12-14; etc.; and especially read Dan. 9:24-27, and Dan. 12).

(3) Look also at Matt. 24:20:

Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, *neither on the Sabbath day*.

How could a believer offer such a prayer, since the Sabbath, the seventh day (and no other than the seventh) is to him as any other day in the week? But if this instruction were given to the Jews, who would be still under the law, all becomes immediately intelligible.

(4) There is another important link in the argument. If you will open your Bible, and look at Matt. 24:29 and 30, you will note the following order of events: After the tribulation, the sun darkened, etc., then the appearance of the sign of the Son of man in heaven, then the mourning of all the tribes of the earth, and their seeing the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and then, *after these things* we are told that:

He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

If now you will turn with me to Col. 3:4, you will find these words: "When Christ [who is] our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." Now if these two passages refer to the same event, they are contradictory; for the former states that the tribes of the earth shall see the Son of man coming, etc., before the elect are gathered from the four winds, etc., while the latter states that when Christ shall appear *His people shall appear with Him*. Both therefore cannot refer to the same event; and hence that in Matthew must apply to the coming of the Lord to the earth, to bring together to Zion His elect remnant of the Jews.

For these reasons we have no alternative, if our minds are not biased or prejudiced by a preconceived system, but to conclude that Matt. 24 has no reference to the coming of the Lord for His saints; but that it refers to the Lord's dealings with His ancient people previous to His appearance on their behalf, when He comes to reign in mount Zion, according to the testimony of the prophets.¹¹

And with this conclusion agrees the local references of the chapter, such as Judea (Matt. 24:16), the holy place (v. 15), etc.; and, I may add also, the connection. For we find that at the end of Matt. 23 our Lord pronounces this solemn sentence upon Jerusalem: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (vv. 38, 39). Then we read: "And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and His disciples came to Him for to show Him the buildings of the temple," etc.; and it is this incident which gives rise to the discourse; for Jesus replied, "See ye not all these things? verily

11. {Matt. 24 through v. 44 has to do with the 70th week of Dan. 9. It is explicitly stated in Dan. 9:24 that the 70 weeks "are apportioned out upon thy people and thy holy city." Thus, the 70th week has to do with Daniel's people, the Jews – not the church.}

I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." After this, upon His being seated upon the mount of Olives, "the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world (age, αἰῶνος)?" The discourses on which we have commented is the answer to this question; and it all proceeds in harmony with the conclusions at which we have arrived. The Lord had pronounced His solemn sentence upon His people; and immediately He departs from the temple, goes outside of the city, seats Himself upon Olivet with the city full in view, and in that position He describes her fate, and the history of His ancient people down to the end of the age. To introduce the church in such a connection is but to mar the unity of the discourse, and to confuse the simplicity of the divine wisdom.

Adopting then the view we have substantiated from an examination of this chapter, we have gained two things; first, that the church will not, as far as here appears, be in the final tribulation; and, secondly, that we have a coming of Christ to the earth which is altogether distinct from His return for the church.

3. Passing now for the moment over the epistles, we will next examine the Revelation; for this book is all-important for the decision of the question as to whether the church will be in the tribulation. In Rev. 1:19 we get the proper division of the book. "Write," says the Lord to John, "the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter"(or rather "after these" μετὰ ταῦτα). Here then is a threefold division of the book:

- first, "*the things which John saw*," described in the first chapter;
- next, "*the things which are*"; the church dispensation, contained in the second and third chapters;
- and finally, "*the things which shall be after these*," detailed in the rest of the book.

According to this arrangement the era of the church on earth closes at the end of the third chapter; and the seven churches represent the different successive, and in measure the contemporaneous, states of the whole Church until the time of the end. This, it must be remembered, is no novel theory, but is held and propounded by different and even antagonistic schools of interpretation. If this be so, the rapture of the saints, the coming of the Lord to receive His people, although not described, because not falling within the scope of the book, must take place between the third and fourth chapters; and consequently all the judgments that fall upon the earth after the third chapter are *subsequent to the return of the Lord for the church*.

I have thus in a few words stated what in my judgment is the correct outline of the book; but I will now adduce proofs from the book itself that this division is according to the mind of God. In harmony with what has been stated, you will find that Rev. 4 opens with these words: "After this" (and literally it should be, "After these things," thereby showing the connection with Rev. 1:19), "I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter." (Again it should be, "after these things μετὰ ταῦτα). That is, John having described "the things which

are," {of Rev. 2, 3} is then in spirit, taken up to heaven to behold the "things which must be after these," the dealings of God in government with the earth, and especially with His ancient people, as the center of His counsels respecting the earth, after the church dispensation has been brought to a close. And we have only to look at what was immediately presented to his view, to see how wonderfully this statement is confirmed. First of all he beheld "a throne set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And He that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four-and-twenty seats: *and upon the seats I saw four-and-twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; they had on their heads crowns of gold*" (Rev. 4:2-4).

Who then are these elders? Their number was four-and-twenty, corresponding with the twenty-four courses into which the priests were divided by David (see 1 Chron. 24), and hence representative of a complete body. But whom do they represent? You will notice that they were "clothed in white raiment," and that "they had on their heads crowns of gold." The white raiment will set forth their priestly character, besides being the well-known symbol in this book for the righteousnesses (exact translation) of saints (Rev. 19:8); while the crowns of gold bespeak their royal dignity. Where then are we to look for this combination of character? We get the answer in this same book: "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us *kings and priests* unto God and His Father," etc. (Rev. 1:5, 6); and again in the epistle of Peter: "Ye are a chosen generation, a *royal priesthood*," etc. (1 Peter 2:9). The elders therefore, it is clear, represent glorified saints, and, inasmuch as their number represents the whole body (as we have seen), the saints in their totality glorified together with Christ. Hence we see that the church is on high, having been caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and glorified together with Him before the commencement of the judgments of which the book afterwards speaks.

It may however be objected that the elders are only a symbol. This is quite true, but the conclusion must be the same if we rightly apprehend the nature of the symbol. If the elders symbolize the church,¹² we cannot err if we treat of the church as the thing signified; and it is utterly inconceivable that the elders *in heaven* could point to the church *on earth*, as there must be of necessity agreement between the symbol and the place of the thing signified.

But we can prove the truth of our interpretation from other parts of the book. Thus turn to Rev. 19. After the description of the praise in heaven consequent upon the judgment of the great harlot, we have the anticipative celebration of the dominion of the Lord God omnipotent. Then follows the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9). Thereafter we read, "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 on His head were many crowns; and He had a name written, that no man knew, but He Himself. And He was clothed with a vesture dipped in

12. {Perhaps they symbolize all the saints, O. T. and N. T., resurrected and caught up at the time of the rapture.}

blood: and His name is called The Word of God. *And the armies [which were] in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean,*" etc. (vv. 11-14). The subsequent part of the chapter shows that we have here the account of the coming of the Lord Jesus to the earth, in judgment upon "the beast and false prophet" and their confederated followers, preparatory to the assumption of His millennial kingdom. Where then at this juncture do we find the church? The answer is in Rev. 19:14: "The armies [which were] *in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.*" "The "fine linen, white and clean," we are told in the eighth verse, "is the righteousnesses" (literal translation) "of saints." These armies then represent glorified saints; and hence we gather that they were in heaven with Christ during the final tribulation, and that they come with their Lord when He returns to take His millennial kingdom.

Turn also to Rev. 3:10. Speaking to Philadelphia, the Lord says: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." We have already pointed out the representative character of the seven churches; and hence this promise cannot be confined to the local assembly at Philadelphia; otherwise indeed we should lose all the precious promises in connection with these epistles. But if not, then I submit that we have here a distinct promise that those who keep the word of His patience (and this is characteristic of the church) shall not be in the final tribulation -- the hour of temptation {trial} which shall come upon all the world, etc.

I will ask you now to consider a proof of another character. You will not fail to notice that there are saints on earth during the judgments described after the fifth chapter. (See Rev. 6:10; 12:10, 11; 13:7, 8; 18:4, 5, etc.). If then the church is in heaven during this time, who are these? We have a most decisive answer to this question. In Rev. 15 we read: "And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name" (these characteristics indicate plainly the saints who are on earth during the tribulation) "stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of nations" (marginal reading, which is correct). "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest" (v. 24). Who then are these? They are Jewish saints; for none other will, or could, sing the *song of Moses*, and the song of the Lamb; and indeed the terms "Lord God Almighty," "King of Nations," etc. point just as unmistakably to the same conclusion.

Add to this, that after the third chapter there is not a single trace of the church until we come to the nineteenth chapter; that "the seven Spirits of God" (the Spirit in the plenitude of His power) are seen as "seven lamps of fire burning before the throne" (Rev. 4:5) -- not on earth, as on and after Pentecost -- and you can hardly fail to agree with me, that the Apocalypse proves incontestably that the church will not be in the tribulation; but that the believers of this dispensation will be caught up to meet the lord in the air before that time

of final sorrow comes upon the earth. This conclusion is the same as that which was forced upon us by an examination of Matt. 24; and we see also here, as there, that the coming of the Lord to the earth to assume His millennial kingdom is altogether a distinct thing from His return for His people.

4. We shall pass now to examine some passages to show that, since the church will not be in the tribulation, there is nothing, as far as is revealed, between the saint and the return of our Lord; that, in other words, it is our privilege to look daily for the coming of Christ to receive us unto Himself, that where He is we may be also; i.e., that there are no intervening events, as far as we know from the scriptures, to be looked for, precede, herald, or usher in the coming of Christ for the church.

With this end in view, we take first the familiar passage from the first epistle to the Thessalonians. Describing the coming of Christ, the apostle says: "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: *then we which are alive and remain* shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:16-17). Now this scripture teaches that there are some believers who will be alive at the coming of the Lord; and the apostle, speaking by the Spirit, says, "we who are alive," showing that as far as had been revealed to him, there was nothing to prevent the possibility of his being one of the number remaining until that time, and therefore that the Lord might come during his day. In giving this interpretation, I by no means forget that its force is sought to be averted by affirming that the apostle, in the use of the word *we*, is speaking corporately of the church -- that he only means, in fact, those who may be left on the earth in a far distant future -- but that, since they will be a part of the church, he links himself with them by the word "we." That there may be examples of such a mode of speech in the Scriptures I am not at all disposed to deny; but that there is any trace of it here I exceedingly doubt. Indeed the context, as well as the object the apostle had before his mind, emphatically forbids its introduction in this connection. Besides, if we turn to the epistle to the Corinthians, we shall find him speaking in precisely the same way. He there also says: "*We* shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed," etc. (1 Cor. 15:51), indicating, beyond a doubt, that the apostle entertained the personal hope that the Lord might come at any time, so that he himself might be found among the number of the living saints at that day.

This conclusion will be strengthened if I draw your attention to the plain distinction which the apostle draws between the return of the Lord for His saints and the day of the Lord -- the day which will be *introduced* on His coming manifestly to the earth to assume His power and to establish His kingdom, as seen for example in Matt. 24. Thus to go back to 1 Thess. After having described the character of the coming of the Lord for His saints (1 Thess. 4:15-18), he proceeds: "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. *For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night*" (1 Thess. 5:1, 2). The saints therefore at Thessalonica had been instructed concerning the day of the Lord -- the coming of the Lord in manifested glory -- as recorded in Matt. 24 and elsewhere. They knew about this perfectly; and hence this is a totally different

thing from the coming of the Lord for His people, concerning which the apostle had just taught them by a special communication from the Lord. Accordingly he proceeds: "Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day" (1 Thess. 5:4, 5). He thus reminds them that they belong to the day -- that day which would bring such terror upon the wicked, and hence that they would not be upon the earth in the darkness when it dawned.

So also in the second epistle. "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our lord Jesus Christ, and [by] our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled," etc., "as that the day of Christ is at hand" (as that the day of the Lord is present, is the correct reading and translation) {2 Thess. 2:1, 2}. That is, he reminds them of the instruction given them in the former epistle concerning the coming of the Lord, and their being gathered unto Him; and makes this the ground of his appeal to them, not to be disturbed by the false teaching then current, that the day of the Lord was already come. "How," in effect he says, "can this be, when before the day of the Lord is present you will have been caught up to meet Him in the air?" Then, having disabused their minds of this error, he details some features that must precede that day, revealing to them that the apostasy must first come, and the man of sin be revealed, etc.; features therefore, on this interpretation, which will *follow upon* the rapture of the saints, and precede the day of the Lord (2 Thess. 2).

The constant attitude of waiting for Christ, which is spoken of everywhere throughout the epistles, is confirmatory of this view. "Waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:7). "Our conversation is in heaven, whence also we look for the Saviour," etc. (Phil. 3:20); "How ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven" (1 Thess. 1:9-10); "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). We may adduce here also the injunctions as to watching which the Lord so frequently enjoined upon His disciples: "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord," etc. (Luke 12:35-40)

Now I venture to say that, if our souls were simple before the Lord, we could not understand either the expressions in the epistles or the injunctions of our Lord, in any other way than as teaching that the Lord might return at any moment for His people -- than, in fact, that He intended the immediate prospect of His return to operate on our souls day by day in detaching us from things around, in separating us entirely unto Himself and in purifying ourselves even as He is pure (1 John 3:2, 3).

Only one thing more need occupy our attention before drawing this letter to a close. Very much is made of the fact by some that the coming of Christ for His people {i.e., the rapture} seems at times to be identified with His revelation, i.e. His appearing to the world. Thus in 1 Cor. 1:7 (a scripture already quoted), we have "waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (margin). "Here," opponents triumphantly exclaim, "is a plain proof that the coming of Christ for His people, and His manifestation to the world when every eye shall see Him, is one and the same thing." No, we reply, it cannot be, because the apostle says, that "when Christ [who is] our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with

Him in glory" (Col. 3:4); and therefore we know that the saints are with the Lord before His appearing. The fact is, when the responsibility of the saints on earth is brought in, the goal is the appearing of Christ, because that is the time of the displayed recompense of the saints, the time when the Lord comes "to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired" (wondered at)" in all them that believe" (2 Thess. 1:10). In this connection, therefore (as in this chapter), the recompense of the saints, and the destruction of "them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," are found side by side. The earth was the scene of the sufferings of the saints, and of the disobedience of unbelievers and therefore the earth shall behold the recompense of the one, and the destruction of the other. This is why we have the time of the appearing here introduced, and in 1 Cor. 1:7; and indeed in every case where the thought of the responsibility of saints on earth is prominent. Otherwise the goal of expectation is the Lord's return, which indeed is the hope of the church for the Lord is the bright and morning Star, as well as the Sun of righteousness (Rev. 22:16; Malachi 4:2; and compare 2 Peter 1:19); and hence it is our blessed privilege to wait constantly for His coming.

Enough now has been said to show you three things:

- first, that the church will not have to pass through the final tribulation;
- secondly, that there are no necessary intervening events, as far as we know from the scriptures, between the present and the Lord's return;
- and consequently in the last place, that the proper attitude of the believer is that of waiting for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the promise He has left us, that He "will come again to receive us unto Himself; that where He is we may be also" (John 14:3).

Much might be added upon the practical aspects of this doctrine, upon the blessed influence which the expectation of the Lord at any moment is calculated to exert upon the soul; but this I must leave you to gather from your own study of the Scriptures. For I am assured that, if you once perceive that the Lord's coming is the proper and constant hope of the church, you will soon discover its sanctifying power upon the heart and life. Hence I cannot but pray that you may soon be led into the apprehension of this truth, in the power of the Holy Spirit; and therefore that you will faithfully, as before God, refuse all teaching which either omits, or contradicts it; for no one can rightly divide the word of truth who is ignorant of this most blessed and sustaining hope.

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