

*An unusual and stimulating presentation of the spiritual
nature of the Kingdom*

A STUDY OF THE KINGDOM

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“The Origin of Christian Science”

and

“A Study of the Holy Spirit”

In this mature product of years of sympathetic and thorough study, Dr. Stafford throws real light upon a rather confused subject. In placing the emphasis upon the nature rather than upon the mechanics of the Kingdom, the author shows a proper appreciation of relative values which he maintains throughout the volume. His style of treatment is practical rather than technical or theoretical. His language is clear and forceful, his reasoning is sound and convincing. Incidentally, he presents some rather stubborn arguments against premillennialism. The book will appeal to the intelligent layman as well as to the student of theology

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To

GRACE UTLEY STAFFORD, *My Mate,*
“Steel True and Blade Straight”

PREFACE

A few years ago, I began to study with special interest the nature of the kingdom of God. It was obvious to me that some, who were speaking and writing on this important subject, were in no little confusion of mind concerning it. It seemed to me that I might do the cause we love some good by an orderly arrangement of the simple and primary principles of the kingdom, holding fast always to the fundamental and essential truths of the gospel. There is an imperative need that we give this scriptural and vital subject a thorough and balanced treatment, and not a partial and prejudiced one, in which “special pleading,” rather than an interpretation of the Scriptures and an understanding of the doctrine, is the real objective. The reader must be the judge as to how well, or how ill, I have reached the end aimed at.

The question of the millennium is a most vital one. Many would like to pass it by as of no moment. But it is a mistake to attempt to dispose of it in this way. It will not “down.” It enters essentially into the question of the nature of the kingdom. Bible interpreters are split into two well-defined groups determined by the issue of premillennialism and postmillennialism. There is no middle ground. One creates a little humor, but should not be taken seriously, when he says that he is neither a premillennialist nor a postmillennialist but a pro-millennialist.

In dealing with this great problem two mistakes have been made, the assumption on the part of some premillennialists that they represent the only possible orthodox or Bible view and the position of certain postmillennialists, or anti-millennialists, who rather concede this assumption and then take refuge in science and history as they understand them and in evolution and destructive criticism to establish postmillennialism or no millennialism. But this is

rationalism and not Christianity. It is a discrediting of the Bible by those professing to be its friends. It is useless to try to answer devout, though mistaken, belief with arguments of unbelief. Infidelity has no rights in this court. In this discussion the arguments for postmillennialism are drawn from the Bible itself and not from a rationalistic interpretation of science and history. The writer does not believe in evolution as properly defined. He does believe in science and in constructive criticism.

It would be useless to attempt to give credit to those writers to whom I am indirectly indebted. To some, a few, I am directly beholden and these I mention in the course of the discussion. But I am not restating, nor reviewing, nor combining the thoughts of other men. My purpose has been to give an interpretation of the Scriptures. In studying and teaching the Bible for some years there has been given to me special opportunity to bring to its bar of judgment the various views of interpreters, their findings and their guessings. With patience, and, I hope, with fairness and justice, I have dealt with these views, approving or disapproving them according to the standards of the Biblical court in which the case should be tried. "To the law and to the testimony" is the rule that has been constantly ringing in my mind. I have tried to do nothing else than to give a statement for our day of the Christian doctrine of the kingdom.

I hope that I have succeeded in the purpose to keep the discussion free from a controversial tone. I am dealing with positions, not persons. It gives me inward pain to dissent from the cherished theories of some thinkers of great distinction, whom I honor, some of whom also I know personally and am proud to count my friends. But I am for conscience sake bound to do it. I ask the reader, who may not at first agree with the arguments, notwithstanding this fact,

to give them careful consideration. It is the truth that we want to see and embrace. No man's opinion as such is of much importance.

T. P. STAFFORD.
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CHAPTER 1 – THE REALITY OF THE SPIRITUAL

“For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, *even* his everlasting power and divinity.” (Rom. 1:20.)

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (2 Cor. 4:18.)

“Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1.)

There are two, and only two, kinds of reality, material and spiritual, visible and invisible, temporal and eternal.

Modern psychology and revelation are one on this proposition. They know only these two realities and no third. Old psychology, which affirms trichotomy, is based on pagan metaphysics and a forced interpretation of Scripture. Heart, soul, mind and spirit in the Bible designate the same element of human nature. Man is not made of three parts but two, matter and mind or body and soul.

In the creation of man, as related in Genesis, these two elements of his nature are specified and only these. (Gen. 2:7.) Many other texts point in the same direction. (Cf. Ecc. 12:17; Matt. 10:28; Luke 23:46; Acts 2:31.) If some passages seem to suggest that man is a compound of three or more elements, a better way to understand them is that the several words used are for emphasis and rhetorical effect and not for logical analysis. This verse, for example, has been cited to prove trichotomy: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” (Mk. 12:30.) But if it proves that man is made of three

parts it proves more, that he is made of four parts or even five. It is evident that the four nouns are put to use by Jesus to enforce as strongly as possible the duty of love to God and not to point out psychological distinctions.

There are two real worlds, the world of things and the world of thoughts. Every attempt to explain one in terms of the other or to deny either has led to absurdities. When the idealist says there is no matter, it is no matter what he says. When the materialist says there is no mind, we need not mind what he says. We are in touch with both these worlds of reality. We are partakers of both. We live in both.

The spiritual is real. It is as real as the material. The soul is as real as the body. Mind is as real as matter.

God is spirit and God is real. He is not seen with our natural eyes. He is invisible. But in him we live and move and have our being. We know him. The purpose of the gospel is that we might know him. The idolater does not and cannot know him. His idol is a blind to his vision. Only he who knows the reality of the spiritual can know God. "No man hath seen God at any time," that is with the eyes of the body; but "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God," that is, with the eyes of the soul.

Christ is real and he is now invisible. For thirty- three years he was manifest in the flesh but "now we know him so no more." (2 Cor. 5:16); and in eternity past he was Deity invisible, except where he chose to appear in some special way to men in the flesh. As the high priest of the Jews, when he offered sacrifice for the people on the great day of Atonement, passed out of sight into the most holy place, so Jesus has passed into the heavenly holy of holies and is beyond the reach of mortal eye. (Heb. 6:20.) He has ascended to the place where he was before. But to believers he is real, most real. He is more real to us than he was to the disciples when they discerned

him by means of the senses. To Paul the ascended and invisible Jesus was as real as was the “descended” and visible Jesus to Peter, James and John, as they knew him in the flesh.

The Holy Spirit is not seen but is real. The name Spirit suggests his invisible character and was no doubt chosen for this purpose. A few times the Holy Spirit has manifested himself in visible forms, or miraculously, for a sign, or for the purpose of creating faith, but in his essential nature he is invisible.

It is strictly true to say the Holy Spirit is *felt, not seen*. But it is not one of the “five senses” by which he is discerned. Christians at least have a “sixth sense,” that is a spiritual sense, by which divine realities are discerned. “Whom the world cannot receive; for it beholdeth him not, neither know- eth him: ye know him; for he abideth with you and shall be in you.” (Jno. 14:17.)

Now the Holy Spirit gives character to Christianity. The essence of Christianity is not anything outward or visible but something inward and invisible and the presence of the Holy Spirit was so real and vivid to the writers of the New Testament and their knowledge of him so certain that they never asked for any proof that they possessed him but on the other hand considered their having the Holy Spirit as proof of many other things. If one stands in the sunlight that is shining all around him and whose warmth is felt in every part of his body, he needs no proof that the sunlight is. It is more certain to him than any proof can make it., He that has the Holy Spirit is conscious that he has him.

The three great realities of the Christian life and faith, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are spiritual and invisible realities. They must be so conceived if one would experience even an initiation into Christianity. “God is spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth.” (Jno. 4:24.)

We can see why Moses and the prophets inveighed against

idolatry. Their mission was to give the world a spiritual conception of God. We can see why the apostles and other teachers of the New Testament are silent as to the physical features of Christ and said as little as possible about his external life, the bodily qualities and relations of his person, and how, most of all, this is true of the Apostle John, whose plan it was, according to tradition to give us a “spiritual gospel.” Their mission was to portray a Savior, the essence of whose life is spiritual, and who saves men by lifting them into spiritual fellowship with himself. All of the external and material that was necessary was what was sufficient to give Jesus an historical setting.

The light or careless references to the great subject of the Holy Trinity, which one sometimes hears, show that the speaker is “of the earth earthy.” They show that he is as yet a stranger to the kingdom of God and must be converted in order to enter into it or even to see it. The kingdom of God rests on the three eternal spiritual realities of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He who does not grasp this truth is an alien and is lost.

Since some may consider the above affirmations to be dogmatic and unscientific and belonging to the vague realm of the imagination, let us consider further that the best things of life, and the things that are experienced by us, here and now, and are therefore most certain, belong also to the realm of the spiritual.

The human mind is spiritual. It is not matter nor a highly developed or evolved state of matter. We see the brain but not the mind. I dare to say that if an instrument were invented by which we could see the movements of the brain as we think, if there be such movements, we would not know any more about the mind and its processes than we now know. I doubt if we could tell as much about our thoughts in that way as we now tell from facial expression. By introspection we know the mind best, for the mind is the man

himself.

Now we know material things by means of the senses, but we do not know the mind by any one or all of the senses. We do not see it, nor hear it, nor feel it, nor taste it, nor smell it. Nevertheless, to us nothing is more certain than that the mind is. We are conscious of ourselves. We know that we are. And yet almost every proposition that we affirm of a material thing we can deny of the mind; everyone, I believe, except existence. A material object has size, weight, impenetrability, location. All of these qualities we deny to the mind. The mind has no size, nor weight, nor impenetrability, nor location; that is, such location as can be determined by the senses. It may not be strictly correct to say that the mind is *in* the body. It may not be in the brain any more than in the countenance. We cannot locate it. Its “seat” has never been found, either in the heart or in the head, or in the neural organism. Nor does it seem proper to say that it is diffused through the body. He who can explain the relation of the mind to the body has greater fame awaiting him than he attained who discovered the circulation of the blood. The serious speculation of Descartes, that the point of union of the mind and the body is the “pineal gland suspended in the midst of the brain,” does little more than to excite our amusement.

All this should make it plain that the mind, the soul, the personality, since it is immaterial, does not submit to the “profane testing” of the senses. And yet nothing is more real to us than we are to ourselves. Self-consciousness is as vivid as consciousness. Descartes’ experience in doubting has great value. He found that he could doubt everything except that he, the doubter, existed. On this rock- bottom of experience and fact, beneath which doubt could not dig, he built up his system of philosophy.

As life itself is a thing invisible so are the virtues and the noble qualities of life invisible. Truthfulness, without which character has

no value, is an unseen virtue. We see its manifestations in words and in deeds with which it clothes itself, but the attribute itself is hidden from our view. Honor, that crowns its possessor with conscious dignity, is not seen. But he has it who knows that he has it. Love, whose beauty poets cannot fully sing, whose dimensions mathematicians cannot measure; love, both divine and human, is a thing unseen, though its fruits are never unseen. Friendship, the golden thread of faith and loyalty that binds together in heavenly affinity kindred souls, is invisible. The motive of man, which renders sacred or profane all deeds in both divine and human courts, is invisible. Are these virtues not real? All virtues are real to him who has them. The skepticism of him who has them not is, therefore, of no value.

Inanimate life even is invisible. We see its manifestations, we do not see the life itself. We see the seed which the life hides or in which the germ resides, but no microscope reveals the life principle, the reality itself.

The very forces of nature, spoken of generally as visible, are on the contrary invisible. We see their effects only. We do not see the wind nor electricity nor the force of gravity. We do not see even the sun's beam. We see the effects of these forces as they make their impact on material things.

He who believes only what he sees has no explanation of what he sees. He lives in the animal's world. The unbeliever who says we have no right to affirm the existence of the soul, because we do not know it apart from the body, is sufficiently answered by the fact that it is the mind only that affirms the existence of the body.

Let us go still further. Spiritual realities are more real than material things; and they may be more vividly realized. This is not what is commonly believed, but it is what a thoughtful consideration will enable us to see. It seems to be the meaning of Paul: "The

things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (2 Cor. 4:18.)

When I say spiritual realities are more real than material things, I would not suggest that material things do not really exist but only appear to. They exist and are real, but their reality is not so lasting, has not so much meaning or significance, as spiritual realities have. Both exist but the spiritual have more truth and dominance. In this sense thoughts are more real than things, the mind more real than matter.

This is true and can be appreciated as true from the simple fact that a man is more real to himself than are material things real to him, not excepting even the members of his own body. And this proposition is easily seen to be true simply because the thoughts of the mind, which, if they are not the mind itself, are its acts or agents, through which material objects are known, must be more vividly realized than things of the external world, whose existence and qualities are known only by means of such acts or agents. My thoughts are more real to me than the things of which I think. I am more real to myself than my hand is to me. The post that I bumped my head against was not real to me until I felt it. The measure of the reality that I then put into it was the measure of my sensation plus some reflection.

This is not only the view that we as Christians may hold but it is the view of the greatest intellects of the world. In so thinking we are keeping company not only with Paul but also with Plato.

That we may appreciate more vividly the reality of the spiritual we will look at the subject from another angle. We are not convincing ourselves of what is profound or afar off but are seeing what is before us and what is Obvious.

1. *The fact of the spiritual is essential to our understanding of the material world itself.*

Things do not understand things. It is mind that understands things.

Again, as soon as we begin to explain the world of things about us, we assume the spiritual, that is, principles of truth and reality that are invisible. A fact is a mighty thing, but it is not as mighty as its significance is, or as the truth involved in it and connected with it is. The meaning of a fact is mightier than the fact.

Lyman Abbott has well said:

“The power to look at things which are not seen is not peculiar to pietists and poets. It distinguishes man from the brute. It is the secret of all civilization, material and spiritual.

“Innumerable men had seen apples fall from the trees. Newton perceived the invisible force which drew the apple from the tree, the invisible force which binds all the physical forces of the universe together and makes it one. Innumerable men had seen the lightning in the sky. Because Franklin and Morse and Edison perceived the invisible force which produces the lightning and the invisible laws which govern it, electricity which no man has ever seen and no man can define, carries our messages, lights our houses and moves our trolleys and our trains. The scientist differs from the casual observer because he looks at the forces which are not seen, learns their nature and the methods of their operation.”

2. Does it need to be stated that the existence of the spiritual in the form of a person is essential to the understanding and appreciation of the spiritual in any form or even to the conception of it?

Only mind understands mind. Trees do not understand trees, much less do they understand minds. When some mathematicians talk about a fourth dimension I have no conception of what they mean. I can neither deny nor affirm. There may be such a thing. But my denial would not imply nor argue its existence. But if I should

deny the existence of the spiritual, my position would be self-contradictory, because having the idea of the spiritual, the existence of which I deny, requires its existence in the form of my own mind.

Once a man hearing a suspicious noise in his henhouse hurried out, gun in hand and demanded, "Who's there?" The negro thief scared out of his wits, answered in a low tone from underneath the roost, "Nobody, boss, but de chickens." His denial proved his presence. So, the denial of the spiritual is proof of its reality.

By that power or intelligence by which I say I have a body, by the same power or intelligence do I say I am other than my body. I believe God created me. I do not know the process by which I came to be, but I know I am. Therefore, I shall use no word that implies that I am derived from matter or reducible to matter. By the power by which I know things by that same power do I know I am not a thing. I am a person. I think, I feel, I desire, I will, I am conscious of obligation. If it be said to me, "But at first your mind was a blank tablet and all that came into it came from without," I answer: "That is a figure of speech, my mind never was a blank tablet; a white piece of paper cannot experience sounds and sights and learn to walk."

If it be said, "But there is nothing in the mind which was not first in the senses and, therefore, all knowledge comes from without the mind and is of a material character and hence the mind itself is of such a character," I reply: "I refuse to be caught by any trick of words. I shall not reject what is evident in the light to accept what is obscure in the dark. I shall not give up consciousness for logic." There is something wrong with such logic. I am conscious of being other than that kind of logic would prove me to be. You cannot explain mind in terms of matter. "Every thought change is a brain change and every brain change is a thought change." That may be true. But if one uses it to conclude that the body dominates the

mind, he points his gun at his own head; if he uses it to show the dominance of the mind over the body he will “bring down the game.”

Materialism is not only the denial of God; it is self-assassination; it is mental suicide.

3. A belief in the reality and dominance of the spiritual is essential to a hopeful view of the world.

Without it there is no such thing as progress or stimulus to progress. There would be events, but they would point neither upward nor downward for they would have no value. To speak of a “force that makes for righteousness” would have no meaning. A force that makes for righteousness must be an intelligible and purposeful force. Now if the spiritual does not dominate the material, all force is blind force.

I know a preacher of heroic mold who said that he, when he began his ministry fifty years ago, took a confident stand for prohibition, because he did not think that a righteous God would let a wicked thing like the saloon endure in this country. His belief in God made him progressive. Edmond Burke recognized slavery as a great evil but saw no cure for it, great statesman though he was. Abraham Lincoln believed it could be destroyed and saw it done. A lawyer writing sixty years ago on the subject of woman’s suffrage prophesied with the lack of vision, characteristic of the pessimist, that though there was no good reason why women should not vote they probably never would.

Again, let us hear Lyman Abbott in these forceful sentences:

“The difference between a statesman and a politician is that the statesman looks at the forces which are not seen, while the politician ignores them and prides himself upon being a practical man, without vision. It was because Washington and his contemporaries saw an invisible power uniting men by a common hope, a common ideal,

and a common resolve that they devised a new kind of government resting upon the common sense and the common conscience of the people. It is because there were leaders who could look at and rightly appreciate the invisible forces of patriotism and humanity in the hearts of the sons and daughters of America that, breaking away from all the restraints with which a selfish policy bound us, we entered the World War and gave our money, our food, our sons, our daughters, to save humanity from despotism and endow the world with liberty.”

When Margaret Fuller said that she “accepted the universe,” Carlyle retorted, “Gad, she’d better.” John Burroughs comments on this incident thus: “It ought not to be a hard thing to accept the universe, since it appears to be a fixture and we have no choice in the matter.” But it is asking too much of a rational being to tell him to accept a fact because he has to, that is, just because it is a fact. Such skeptical dogmatism is disrespect for his intelligence. The gracious God that gave him reason does not treat him so. The universe, as Carlyle himself, in one of his moods described it, we do not have to accept: “One huge, dead, immeasurable, steam engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference, to grind me limb from limb.” I count myself “better” for not accepting that sort of a universe. The pantheist must accept it or must try to, for his god has not anything better for him. I agree rather with Stevenson when he says, “I believe in an ultimate decency of things; aye, and if I woke in hell, should still believe it.”

We can believe heroically with Tennyson in a final glorious consummation of all things, because God is over all. He is at the helm. The ship will not go upon the rocks. To us it is a trackless sea, but not to him. God is on his throne; all will be well with the world, though much be wrong with it now.

This is the Christian’s happy, hopeful and inspiring view of the

world. I say not that he *may* have it. I say he *must* have it. The pessimist is a sinner.

“Right is right, since God is God,
And right the day must win.
To doubt would be disloyalty;
To falter would be sin.”

4. *A belief in the reality and supremacy of the spiritual is essential to moral living.*

There are two kinds of laws, material and moral. The one tells us how things do act; the other how persons ought to act. These two conceptions are so different that it is strange that one term came to be the name for both. The one describes an order of facts; the other an ideal order. The one is what man discerns; the other is what God requires. Now certainly what God requires is as real as what man discerns, and being so, it becomes also for him a standard to regulate his conduct. For this truth Socrates lived and died. The Sophists denied it. It is easy to choose between Socrates and Protagoras.

I hear a voice. It comes from without. It may be from across a great chasm. It says: “Thou shalt do right. Count not the cost.” It is the unconditional imperative. My conscience answers: “Amen! I hear, I heed, I hesitate not. I will do it though the heavens fall.” Is this conscience of mine the echo of an imaginary voice? Is it emptiness answering to emptiness or is it reality answering to reality? My conscience is not a fiction. It is not a usurper. To reign in me is its right. By so ‘much as I am above the brute by that much do I feel obligation. By so much as I obey my conscience by that much am I conscious of moral worth. If God be not, then my conscience belies me. By so far as I put God out of my thoughts by that far do I kill my conscience. A moral being requires two things, conscience within and God without.

I ought, says conscience. Therefore, *I can*. My mind is the master

of my body. Three factors make character, heredity, environment and will. It is the last that is the determining force. By it I can move upstream or climb a mountain. By it I can organize and direct every material element that belongs to me and much that is about me. Man is the architect of his own character. He can, if he wills to bolt the door, lock God out of the citadel of his soul. God gave him this mastery over himself. God respects him too much to break down the door. In this sense every man is a self-made man.

If an engine pulls a long train of cars up a steep grade, we do not put a golden crown on its smokestack and give it a reception. It did what it had to do when the steam was turned into the cylinders. It had no choice. It acted as it was acted upon. It moved in the line of least resistance. But when a man plays the game of life well, we honor him. He could have done otherwise. If he plays it badly, we blame him. If we say he could not have done other than to lie or to steal or to cheat, we damn him the more. We *denature* him. A football of circumstances is a thing, not a man.

5. *A belief in the reality of the spiritual is essential to heroic living.*

They died for a *cause*, those brave men who now sleep “row on row where poppies blow, in Flanders fields.” It was not a delusion that led them on. They had a vision of truth more real than flesh and bones and blood. Bruno loved the truth of nature, not its mere facts, so much that he died for it. His soul was so loyal to it that he gave his body to be burned. Was it a delusion that obsessed him or a vision of the spiritual that possessed him? Did Socrates drink the hemlock for naught? Was he sane or was he insane? The answer of history is that he saw clearly in the light and the Sophists groped in the shadow. To him the spiritual was real. Plato saw the world of ideas, ideas ordered and harmonious like the stars in the firmament in a cloudless night. Was it a fancy? Was this world-conquering

thinker a dreamer of dreams?

Moses “endured as seeing him who is invisible.” So did all the heroes of faith. There is no other way to build a hero. He is in contact with another world. His citizenship is in heaven. It is only men with such consciousness who can, like Paul, count their lives as not dear unto themselves.

Look at the author and finisher of our faith, Jesus Christ himself. He “staked it all” on the reality and supremacy of the spiritual. He did not lay hold of a single material instrument. He did not rely upon a single worldly force. He did not appeal to a single motive that arises from the physical. He was born in a home most humble and lived in a disreputable town. He surrendered his earthly life in the prime of manhood. He sought for no influential “friends in court.” He refused the sword. He wrote no book. He arranged for no monument to be raised to perpetuate his name. He organized no force to carry on his work except a band of such persons as were drawn together by the same spiritual sentiments that inspired him. He appealed to no worldly motive whatever but to love justice, mercy and truth. He was the most thorough-going idealist of history. But he was no visionary. He was a practical idealist. He staked it all upon the reality of the spiritual and won and is still winning. He saw realities as they are. He was as conscious of the spiritual world as of the material and gave it the first place. “Be not afraid,” he said, “of them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matt. 10:28.) By this principle he himself also lived. While he was saying to others to “seek first the kingdom of God” he himself was fulfilling this ideal.

6. A belief in the spiritual is essential to Christian living.

All Christian living has two prominent elements, prayer to and fellowship with him who is invisible.

What to the unbeliever is a Christian on his knees in prayer? It is superstition. It is self-imposed humiliation. It is talking into empty space. But to the Christian it is a vital breath. All space is for him filled with “relay-magnets” to get his petition delivered to the throne. And his soul is so in tune with the divine “wireless” that he receives immediately a return message. He knows. He has “experimented” with it often and by it he never fails to put the Devil to rout, who not only trembles but flees when he sees a saint upon his knees. He knows the power of prayer as he knows the power of bread and butter and by the same method, experience. “He that cometh to God must believe that he is.” (Heb. 11:6.)

But a Christian is as truly a Christian when standing on his feet as when on his knees, when working as when praying. That is, we live as Christians when we have conscious fellowship and friendship with God. As the deep diver to the bottom of the sea lives by the air that is supplied to him from above, so does every Christian live in this world by the divine atmosphere that comes to him from above. If the contact be broken, he is asphyxiated. We do not live by formulas or formalities nor by rote or dry rules. We live by a vital breath. God called Abraham his friend. Jesus called the disciples his friends. He said they must abide in him as the branches abide in the vine. Without him we can do nothing, without him we are nothing. It is said, “He breathed on them, and saith unto them, “Receive ye the Holy Spirit.” (John 20:22.)

CHAPTER 2 – THE REALITY OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE

I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses;
And the voice I hear,
Falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses.
He speaks and the sound of his voice
Is so sweet the birds hush their singing,
And the melody
That he gave to me
Within my heart is ringing.
And he walks with me and he talks with me,
And he tells me I am his own,
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.

“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matt. 18:20.)

A remarkable promise this is. As far as I am aware no other person in all history ever made such a promise, so daring, so challenging.

Jesus could have made a false promise, that is, it is thinkable that he did. But if this were a false promise, it would have appeared to be such. The disciples then and since would have found it to be an empty boast, a bitter disappointment. So great is the claim for himself involved in this promise that if it is not true, Jesus is either a deceiver or of an unbalanced mind. If this is a false promise, then

Christianity was born dead and Jesus was a failure and knew it. And more, he was covering up his failure by extravagant braggadocio.

But this promise is a true promise. Jesus kept his word with his first disciples, and he has kept it with all his disciples through the centuries. Wherever they meet together in his name he is with them. It is their privilege and also their duty to realize this spiritual fact, this dynamic truth.

Let us frankly confess that we do not know all the meaning there is in this wonderful promise. I think our danger is that we will put too little into it rather than too much. I prefer to load it heavy rather than light with meaning.

As a preparatory step the following simple statements may be made:

Jesus was, when he gave this promise, with the disciples here on earth. But he has in mind a time when he will not be here as he was then. He went away. He is not now with us as he was with them before his crucifixion. Therefore, he does not mean to say that he will be with those that meet together in his name as he was then with his disciples. Again, he promised that he would come back to the earth. His presence, therefore, with two or three that meet together anywhere in his name must be a different kind of presence from what it was when he was with them three and a quarter years in the flesh, and for forty days in his resurrection body and different also from what it shall be when he returns.

It is a real presence but how shall we conceive it? With what words can we express it?

First and foremost, Christ is present in the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said to Philip, "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." (Jno. 14:9.) God was in Christ. So also, the Son is in the Holy Spirit. We have an illustration of this on the day of Pentecost. Jesus said in connection with the promise of the Holy Spirit, "I will

not leave you orphans: I come unto you.” (John 14:18.) So, on the day of Pentecost not only did the Holy Spirit come but Jesus also came. We are not to understand this as poetical or fanciful or figurative but as matter-of-fact language. It means what it says. The amount of meaning to be put into it, however, depends upon the value of the truth of the Trinity. In a sense Christ is the Spirit. (Cf. 2 Cor. 3:17.) If the measure of Christ is the measure of a mere man, I can brush away all mystery and say the language is fanciful or figurative. But since Christ is God it leads us into the depths of the mystery of the divine omnipresence.

The promise of his presence is also the promise of his power. Where Jesus is, his power is. It seems also true to say that where his power is, he is. Jesus said, “apart from me ye can do nothing.” (John 15:5.) If, then, we do something to advance his cause we have him with us. To have an influence for Christ is to have Christ. (Cf. Matt. 28:19.)

Again, Jesus is present with those that have the same love and purpose that he has. Having a like mind with him is having him. John says that “he that abideth in love abideth in God.” (1 John 4:16.) As the sun is present in its beams of light so is Christ present in Christian graces; for they all emanate from him. In possessing them we possess him. We cannot say this of any mere man. To have patriotic virtues is not to have Washington with us. It is at most only to have a like mind with him, not actually to have his mind. Washington’s relation to political virtues does not equal Christ’s relation to Christian virtues. Washington’s is casual, Christ’s is causal.

The above considerations have brought us to the borderland of great mysteries. I hesitate to say more. I am tempted to suggest that, since divine personality may not be subject to local limitation as human personality is, the presence of Christ with believers, who

meet anywhere in his name, may allow that he is with them also in person, but it seems we ought not to affirm this. The power and glory of his personal presence is the blessing that is reserved for his final advent. In speaking and thinking on this subject we ought not to try to break through the limitations to which our minds are by nature necessarily subject.

It will also simplify and clarify our subject to note here that, while in the Christian doctrine of the presence of Christ there is a kind of mysticism, it is a mysticism far removed from pantheistic or rationalistic mysticism, in which the worshiper or entranced thinker loses his personality and becomes identified with the object of his contemplation. Nothing of this kind is to be thought of as an objective for the Christian worshiper. In communing with Christ, one does not become less himself but, if possible, more himself.

The Neoplatonic mystics had a good illustration of their doctrine. They said that one could meditate so intently upon the “divine world,” its beauty and truth, as to forget himself, as to be unconscious of himself as other than the object which he was contemplating. They thus become one, as the face in the mirror is one with him whom it reflects and who beholds it. This was a high attainment, they thought, this identification of oneself with the universe. It was ecstasy, it was deification, they fancied. Plotinus experienced this state of blessedness and delight three times, it is claimed.

Now in a sense the image in the mirror is one with the object that it reflects, but in another sense, it is not and to think them one, in the sense in which they are two, is to think one of them out of existence. In pantheistic mysticism the personality of the worshiper or thinker vanishes. It sinks out of existence as the wave of the sea sinks back into the sea. It is absorbed in universal reality. Pantheism is, therefore, a thought-crushing and a stupefying system. Its

devotees, if not its inventors, witness to this fact. It is debasing intellectual idolatry. But there is nothing of this in the communion of the soul with Christ. The Christian worshiper is conscious both of himself and of *Another*. To enjoy exhilarating fellowship with him does not *denature* me. To lose myself in him is to find myself anew and better. “We all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit.” (2 Cor. 3:18.) That is Christian mysticism. It does not deform, it transforms the worshiper. It does not absorb, it enlarges personality. It does not eliminate, it elevates individuality.

With the foregoing observations in mind let us approach the meaning of Christ’s promise.

I. *God is in some real sense present in every place and in everything.*

Reason and revelation both affirm this. We can say of the great and gracious God, who is made known to us in Christianity, that he would not make this wonderful world and then forsake it. He does not withdraw himself from it nor vacate wholly any part of it. Solomon was careful to say when the Temple was dedicated, “The heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have builded!” (2 Chron. 6:18.) Isaiah represents God as saying, “The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: what manner of house will ye build unto me? and what place will be my rest?” (Isa. 66:1.) David sings:

“Whither shall I go from thy spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend into heaven, thou art there;
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there.
If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;
Even there shall thy hand lead me,

And thy right hand shall hold me.”

(Ps. 139:7-9.)

We face again the mystery of the divine omnipresence.

God has a relation to *space*. He made it and keeps it as it is. He is not limited to it though it be infinite. It is not his attribute but his creation. There is, it seems, no empty space. God is in it; he fills it.

God is in the *objects* and *forces* that exist in space. His energy preserves them and causes them to fulfill the purpose for which he created them. Paul said to the philosophers of Athens that “in him we live, and move, and have our being.” He is in nature animate and inanimate. He is in human nature. Nature as such, with all its forces and laws, is good. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork.” The immanence of God is as necessary as his providence. As life is diffused through the body so is God in his universe. The universe is his tabernacle. There is no danger in this doctrine of the immanence of God provided we balance it with his transcendence. God is in all and above all. Nature is not his master, not his imprisonment, but his instrument.

This age calls for a new and more positive emphasis upon the truth of God’s presence in nature. Science consciously or unconsciously has pushed him into the background. We need to see God in the stars, the trees, the sea, the clouds, the mountains, as David did. We need to realize that he is near, sustaining all life, as Paul did. Science has kept us so hot on the trail of “second causes” that many have lost sight of the “first cause” of all. To the “modern mind” the metaphysician is a bore, the philosopher a joke and the prophet a speculative witness to be laughed out of court. It talks evermore about matter, force, the laws of nature, gravitation, electricity, evolution, life, etc., as if it really knew what these things are. It keeps our eyes so intensely on the ground that we hardly get a glimpse of the sky. The fact is that these expressions may serve to

conceal the truth as well as to reveal it.

Now after all, what is the meaning of this lingo, matter, force, gravitation, electricity, law of nature, evolution, life, etc.? To some, these words mean just anything except God. With them they push God out of his world. But to others they mean his power and his presence. It all depends on one's attitude of mind. Logic does not compel either conclusion.

Thomas A. Edison says with emphasis: "We don't know one-millionth of one per cent about anything! Why, we don't even know what water is. We don't know what light is. We don't know what gravitation is. We don't know what enables us to keep on our feet, to stand up. We don't know what electricity is. We don't know what heat is. We don't know anything about magnetism. We have a lot of hypotheses, but that's all."

Since science confesses ignorance faith has her inning.

"A fire mist and a planet—
A crystal and a cell—
A jellyfish and a saurian,
And caves where the cavemen dwell;
Then a sense of law and beauty,
And a face turned from the clod—
Some call it Evolution,
And others call it God.
"A haze on the far horizon,
The infinite, tender sky,
The ripe, rich tints of the cornfields,
And the wild geese sailing high—
And all over the uplands and lowland
The charm of the goldenrod—
Some of us call it Autumn,
And others call it God.
"Like tides on a crescent sea beach,
When the moon is new and thin,

Into our hearts high yearnings
Come celling and surging in; —
Come from the mystic ocean
Whose rim no foot has trod—
Some of us call it Longing,
And others call it God.”

The powers and principles of nature, by whatever name they are designated, are best understood as the potency and presence of God. I would so “call it.”

2. *God is in some places and in some things more than in others.*

Theologians in attempting to explain the omnipresence of God, sometimes affirm that he is wholly present in every place. Concerning this statement, I want to say two things. First, that I have been trying for thirty years to understand it and have not succeeded. Secondly, that I have discovered that nobody can know what it means, because it is a contradiction in thought. This is one of those deadening ideas that were brought over into Christian theology from pagan philosophy. It is indigenous to the soil of Neoplatonic pantheism but in the Christian system it is a “foreign substance.” It has no place in the mind that thinks of God as a person. It is akin to that doctrine of the divine decrees in which God’s one eternal plan swallows up all plural and temporal purposes, so that the latter become only human and imperfect conceptions of God’s providence and power. This speculation has the same pagan source as the other. If these theories were held to rigidly, they would make all objective revelations of God impossible; for they make it impossible for God to “break into” time and space in which spheres or limitations we live and think. We know very little about time and space and, therefore, very little of God’s relation to them. But one thing is as certain as is Christianity itself and that is that God reveals himself in time and space. God’s deeds and purposes in time and space are real to him. Time and

space are as real to God as is the incarnation. I accept the difficulties connected with this view rather than by attempting to avoid them so to relate God to eternity and so to conceive his omnipresence, or his relation to space, as to abstract him from the world in which we live and think. If, then, God's manifestations in time and space are real to him they ought to be real to us. It is not our thinking them so that makes them so. It is their being so that should make us think them so.

I have pointed out the above futile attempt to explain the divine omnipresence that we might the more appreciate the simple truth that Christ's presence with believers is to be received as a fact, a fact known and experienced, rather than understood or explicable. Its mystery does not lessen its actuality. In this respect it is like the fact of my own presence in my body. I cannot explain it. I must accept it.

Jacob slept and dreamed a dream in which he saw the angels of God ascending and descending on a ladder and heard God speaking to him. When he awoke and thought on the matter, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." God was there as he was not in any other place.

Moses at Horeb saw the bush burning and continuing to burn. As he drew near to investigate the "great sight," God stopped him with the command, "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." God was there, at that bush, as he was not in any other place of all the desert.

God was in the "ark of the covenant" as he was not in any other space of three dimensions since the world began. (Ex. 25:22.) The Israelites realized this when they crossed the Jordan. (Josh. 3:15, 16.) The Philistines realized it when they captured the ark and put it in the house of Dagon. (1 Sam. 5:3.)

God was in the temple in Jerusalem as he was in no other temple

made with hands. In it was the “Most Holy Place in which was the ark of the covenant with the Mercy Seat,” where God accepted the offerings of the high priest on the great day of Atonement.

Jerusalem was a holy city. God was in it as he has been in no city since cities were built, and as he will be in no city forevermore. He said he would “cause his name to dwell there.” (Deut. 12:11; 2 Chron. 6:20.) Jesus himself affirmed this truth when he told the woman at Sychar that “salvation is from the Jews.” (John 4:22.)

3. But God being present in the temple in Jerusalem as he was not in any other place is no longer true.

Jerusalem was forsaken by him. Jesus said, “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” (Matt. 23:38.) The ark has long since vanished. The temple was demolished. When Jesus died on the cross the “veil of the temple was rent in two from top to bottom.” (Matt. 27:51.) It was no longer a sacred place. From that instant on it was no holier than any other place. After that God was not there in any sense other than he was, for example, in Mount Gerizim. This is the meaning of what Jesus said to the woman at Jacob’s well. “Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father.” (John 4:21.) In stressing the contrast between the worship of the pre-Christian age and that of the Christian age Prof. Stalker, in his *Ethic of Jesus*, says: “The difference was immense between the religious notions of a Hebrew who, in order to deal with God about himself, had to travel to the sanctuary at Jerusalem and offer a sacrifice to Jehovah there, through the intervention of a priest, and that of one who, wherever he might be, in the utmost corner of the land, could by shutting his eyes and lifting up his hands, deal with the Deity there and then.” (p. 278.)

We are living in a better age. Now we can worship God, if our hearts are right, in one place as well as another. But for fourteen

centuries God was worshiped most truly in the tabernacle and the temple of the Jews. This was so as long as God willed it to be so.

If it be said that it was true because of the limited development of the people of that age and that God adapted his revelation to their imperfect mental conceptions, I freely grant it. But the adaptation was a reality and not a semblance. It was an actual adaptation and not a pretense. The ark was holy; the temple was holy. God was objectively present in them. It was not superstition that regarded him as dwelling there. It was God himself that said he would dwell there. Daniel in Babylon prayed with his windows open toward Jerusalem. This was not superstition. It was seeing the real and the spiritual. It was believing that God was at one point in dynamic contact with the world, as he was at no other point.

But, if we should imagine that any place or thing is holy now as the temple was, we would make a great mistake. No house of worship should be dedicated with the belief that God dwells in it as he did in the temple of the Jews. The notion that God limits his blessing to some sacred spot of ground is inconsistent with spiritual Christianity. It would turn the wheels of progress back nineteen centuries. The contention of Stephen, the first martyr among the disciples, was that the idea of the temple being a sacred place had become obsolete and was no longer true. Jesus, as we have seen, taught the same. The Jews in their narrowness would not receive this truth and they have lost their leadership as a religious force in the world.

Mohammedanism says that, if one would reach the highest blessedness it has to bestow, he must make a pilgrimage to Mecca. If he be poor or decrepit or residing in a far-off land it matters not; he must do it. This defect alone renders the whole system impotent. Only superstitious and ignorant minds will subject themselves to so cruel and so irrational a burden.

The rallying cry of the Crusades, “Rescue the holy sepulcher from the hands of the infidels,” was possible only in a dark age. Had not Christianity at that time been half pagan that cry would have evoked no response. To New Testament Christianity there never was a “holy sepulcher” a “holy stairway” or any place or thing that is in itself holy.

4. *We come then to ask why is any place or thing holy? Certainly, there is a distinction between the sacred and the secular. But why this distinction? What is the difference between them? What is the cause or condition of the divine presence?*

First, we may say that God is present in any place because he wills to be and as he wills to be. This has ever been true. He knows how to “hide himself” and how to manifest his glory. Nothing is holy unless he declares it so, it matters not how much human superstition thinks it so. And if he declares it to be holy, it is, no matter how much unbelief denies it. When John Knox threw the image of the Virgin into the water to see, as he said, if it would swim, he did nothing sacrilegious, though many thought he did. God was not in that piece of wood. But he was in John Knox, though many counted him profane.

Secondly, God is present when there is a mind fitted to receive him. “Where two or three are gathered together in my name,” he says. A world of meaning is in those three words, *in my name*. Christ is “at home” to those who meet together in his name, and always gives them a welcome. “In his name” rings the door-bell of heaven. The name Jesus is the heavenly shibboleth. He who can pronounce it has extended to him the golden scepter. It is the “open sesame” to the kingdom of God and its power.

There is no music in the mountains where there is no ear to hear it. There is no beauty in sky or flower where there is no eye to behold it. Though there may be manifold forms, all colors and

infinite shimmering waves of light, there is no beauty where there is no eye to see it. So, where there is no mind to commune with God there God is not; where there is such a mind there God is. And the measure of the intensity of his presence is the measure of the realization in the believer of his presence.

Where was God A.D. 26? He was with John the Baptist and those that heeded his call to repentance in the wilderness of Judea. Where was God A.D. 27? He was at that spot of the Jordan where Jesus was baptized. He was there with more meaning than he was in the temple in Jerusalem. And wherever the holy feet of the Son of God trod, on mountain, sea or traveled road, there God was. Where was God on the day of Pentecost? He was in the room where the waiting disciples were. He was no more in the Holy of Holies as he had been; for, it was no longer the Holy of Holies.

“In my name” is no magic phrase, but there is wonderful power in it. He who uses it without meaning or sincerity will get no result, unless it be a curse. (Cf. Acts 19:13-16.) Those who speak it truly honor Christ. They give him his rightful place in the world. And, more, they align themselves with him. “In my name” describes their condition of mind and declares their purpose. It means that Christ’s will has become their will and, therefore, that his power has become their power. The bank of heaven will honor any man’s check for any amount issued in the name of Christ. It was organized to do business on this basis and is still solvent.

Notice that it is not believers who *happen* to meet together in some place that are promised his presence, but those that meet *in his name*. It is a meeting, the purpose of which is to honor Christ, that is spoken of.

Christ has all spiritual power and it is his plan to release that power upon the world through spiritual channels; that is, men and women who have the same love and purpose that he has. If they

have his mind it is as natural for them to become channels of blessings as for the irrigation ditches to supply water from the reservoirs above to the fields below. If they have it not it is as impossible for them to help others as it is for water to flow uphill.

“Where two or three are gathered together in my name”—not in the name of science, not in the name of humanity, not in the name of culture, not in the name of business, not in the name of society, not in the name of the state, not in the name of the church, not in the name of morality, and not in the name of all these put together. The good that is in them all and the power that is not in them is in that name which is above every name, the talismanic name—Christ.

A third cause or condition of Christ’s presence is the *association* of believers. “Where *two or three* are gathered together in my name.”

There is a blessing for the solitary believer. He who alone opens his heart to God and trusts him is a temple of the Holy Spirit. He who, sick and weary, forsaken and friendless, turns to God has God. He is with him as truly as he was with Jacob when he slept with a rock for his pillow. But there is a blessing for the “two or three” that is not for the one alone. They need more, they deserve more, they receive more. Jesus did not say, “Where one prays in my name there I am.” That is true. But in the great promise we are considering he speaks of a different presence or a greater power. “Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy, Son thy sins are forgiven.” (Mark 2:5.) It was the faith of the four men that Jesus rewarded.

It is a fact that the kingdom of God moves forward by the effort of believers who are associated together. One Christian alone does not do much. It was when a company of disciples were together on that great and notable day of Pentecost, united in faith and purpose and prayer, that the Spirit of power was poured out upon them. If they had been separated in their several homes that wonderful gift of

God would not have been bestowed upon them. And this has ever been the method of the Spirit. He comes especially upon those that are associated together in Christ's name. It was when Carey got a little association to co-operate with him that the missionary movement began in England. It was two or three young men praying together at a haystack that kindled the missionary flame in America.

The number of believers is immaterial. It is the quality of their faith that counts. He said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name." He did not say, "Where three or four are gathered together in my name." There is no objection to the greater number, but Jesus' promise is to the smallest possible company of believers. A great number is not essential to spiritual power. One long ago said, "There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" (1 Sam. 14:6), Jesus said, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

A state secretary of a large denomination is quoted as saying that the influence of churches of less than a hundred members is negligible. He does not understand the nature and source of spiritual power. It is not man power but divine power that is needed and promised. Many are nervously anxious or ambitious for the unionizing of all Christian people. They seem to think that for the kingdom to move forward *all Christians* must get together in some sort of organization. They ought to learn better the laws of the kingdom. History shows that if they could get what they want there would be little or no value in it. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." (Zech. 4:6.)

CHAPTER 3 – THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

Zion stands with hills surrounded,
Zion, kept by pow'r divine:
All her foes shall be confounded,
Tho' the world in arms combine;
Happy Zion,
What a favored lot is thine.
Ev'ry human tie may perish;
Friend to friend unfaithful prove;
Mothers cease their own to cherish,
Heav'n and earth at last remove;
But no changes
Can attend Jehovah's love.
In the furnace God may prove thee,
Thence to bring thee forth more bright
But can never cease to love thee;
Thou art precious in His sight:
God is with thee,
God thine everlasting light.

Only a few subjects, if any at all, are more important than the nature of the kingdom of God. It is very necessary that we have a correct understanding of it. We cannot know what the gospel is, nor the meaning of the petition, "thy kingdom come," nor the duty to "seek first his kingdom," nor any of the parables of the kingdom, nor anything concerning the millennium, nor the meaning even of the return of Christ, unless we know what the kingdom of God is. There are many babblers babbling on this subject, who do not take

time to consider the nature of the thing of which they speak.

The two preceding chapters are a preparation for what is said in this one and in this chapter, I am laying the foundation for almost all that is to follow. I ask, therefore, that the reader will weigh thoughtfully what is now being said. There is nothing profound to be set forth. But clear thinking is required.

The expressions, *kingdom of God*, *kingdom of heaven*, and other expressions equivalent in thought to these, occur in the New Testament some two hundred times. They abound in the Gospels and in Paul's letters. Only Matthew uses *kingdom of heaven*, but he does it some thirty times or more. It has been said that Matthew uses kingdom of heaven instead of kingdom of God because the Jews shrank from the use of the name God. But the fact that kingdom of God is also frequent in Matthew is against this explanation. The two expressions are not identical in meaning. They designate the same institution, but kingdom of heaven points to the spiritual nature of the kingdom, whereas kingdom of God does not, but merely designates the kingdom as belonging to God. The noun heaven in this phrase is in the Greek always plural and should not suggest location but quality. "Of heaven" is equivalent, it seems, to our adjective heavenly or spiritual. In Ephesians Paul uses the expression "in the heavenly places," or better translated "in the heavens," not to signify the location but the quality of that of which he speaks. (Eph. 1:3; 2:6; 3:10.) To the Jews the kingdom of God could very well mean and was apt to mean a worldly kingdom of some kind. It could mean to them the kingdom of Israel and did naturally mean this. Not to allay their scruples then, but to correct their prejudice Matthew designates the kingdom of God as the kingdom of heaven; that is, a heavenly or spiritual kingdom. Paul describes the kingdom as a "heavenly kingdom." (2 Tim. 4:18.)

The purpose of this chapter is to show that the kingdom of God is

a spiritual kingdom. If the definitive phrase “of heaven,” does not require this conception, there are many other considerations that do. The adjective spiritual is, it seems, the word that fits the case best. I would not modify its meaning nor attempt to coin a better word.

There is a reason why John the Baptist and Jesus and the inspired writers of the New Testament called the movement, that we now designate as Christianity, the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. That reason is that Christianity is both like and unlike a kingdom of the world. The noun kingdom points to the similarities between them, the modifying phrases “of God” and “of heaven” point to the dissimilarities between them.

The kingdom of God is in some respects like a kingdom of the world. If this were not true, the name kingdom would not have been given to it. We can count upon it that in inspired writings words do not conceal but reveal the truth. Christianity is not a democracy, nor an oligarchy, nor anarchy nor socialism, but it is a kingdom. It is a monarchy, an absolute monarchy, an autocracy, a theocracy. There is order in the kingdom of God and not chaos. There is law and not license.

The kingdom of God has a king. Christ is the king. He makes the laws. There is no appeal from his decision. With respect to his legislation there is neither “initiative” nor “referendum.” He alone is sovereign. He shares his throne with no other. His rivals are “thieves and robbers.”

When Jesus was born “wise men from the East” came to do homage to him as one born to be a king. His enthusiastic disciples hailed him on the Mount of Olives as king and he refused to silence them. Before Pilate he “witnessed a good confession,” affirming that he was a king. He died as a martyr to the claim. It was the title of the superscription on his cross. Paul thinks of him as a king. “He must reign,” he says, “until he hath put all enemies under his feet.” (1

Cor. 1:5.) He calls him “King of kings and Lord of lords.” (1 Tim. 6:15.) Christ only is the true king. All others are nothing but usurpers or semblances or at most mere symbols.

The kingdom of God has subjects. Every kingdom must have subjects. If not, it is only ideal, not actual. The kingdom of God is an actual kingdom. Jesus spoke to Pilate of his disciples as his “servants,” and said that if his kingdom were of this world, they would fight for him. Never did a king have subjects so loyal, so obedient. Their subjection is complete but voluntary. It is enthusiastic self-surrender; it is unreserved self-abandon, but for a cause that appeals to their intelligence. They count not their lives dear unto themselves. They hold nothing back. They give all and wish they had more to give. Had they ten thousand lives to give they would all be his in service and sacrifice. To them not his will but his wish is law.

He commands some to lay their heads on the block and they obey. He commands some to ascend the scaffold and they hesitate not. He tells some to lie down upon the ground, have kerosene oil poured upon them and be burned as straw and they draw not back. He requires some to face a frowning, sneering, hating world, inflicting tortures long drawn out, and they refuse not. He calls upon some to languish in jail and they do it singing psalms. He sends some into far-away jungles and they go with radiant hope. Because *he* commands it, the heaviest burdens are light and the hardest tasks easy. Where he tells them to go the winter winds are as summer zephyrs. As he has transformed the cross of shame into a symbol of glory so do, they transform ugly duty into service beautiful. To them the way of the cross is the way of life. They find that his yoke is easy and his burden light. There is a sweet reasonableness in it all, a constraining, compelling love. They go not as galley slaves driven to their task, but as free men to inviting adventure and noble

heroism. If they live, they live for him; if they die they shed their blood for the most worthy of causes and go to receive eternal crowns. They are not unfortunates; they are martyrs winning immortality. They are not slaves; they are kings and priests unto God. To serve their Caesar is to reign.

I say again, that no worldly potentates have had such willing, loyal, enthusiastic, intelligent subjects. They were not worthy of them. Their genius was not sufficient to develop them.

It seems reliably reported that Napoleon made the following utterance. Speaking to one of the officers that accompanied him in St. Helena, and comparing Christ with the great men of the world, he said: "I think I understand somewhat of human nature, and I tell you all these were men, and I am a man, but not one is like him; Jesus Christ was more than a man. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I myself founded great empires; but upon what did the creations of our genius depend? Upon force, Jesus alone founded his empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for him." (Geikie's *Life and Words of Christ*, p. 2.)

We said above that the kingdom of God is not a democracy. We were there thinking of the relation of Christians to Christ. He only is Lord. But when we think of Christians in relation to one another, the kingdom of God is a democracy. What God did not see but wished to see in the kingdom of Israel he realizes in his spiritual kingdom.

Accordingly, believers are called a "kingdom and priests," and a "royal priesthood" (Rev. 5:10; 1 Pet. 2:9), that is, Christ only is their king and their priest, and they all are brothers and are equal.

This is the law of the kingdom: "Be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your teacher, and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father on earth: for one is your Father, even he who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even the Christ." (Matt. 23:8-10.) Of these three commandments the Protestants break two

and the Catholics all. Neither are willing wholly to eliminate orders and to come to the simplicities and equalities of the gospel and the kingdom of God, nor to assume the personal responsibilities that a spiritual democracy imposes.

I heard of a Baptist woman who said: "I am tired of being told that I should read my Bible and study and think for myself. I want someone to do all this for me, and I am going where I can get it done for me." I am sure she could soon find some priest or preacher that would relieve her of all responsibility at whatever price she was willing to pay. If she did it, she sold her birthright for a mess of pottage, for that is all such a soul could receive in such an exchange.

Prof. Huxley has said: "I protest that if some great power would agree to make me always think what is true and do what is right, on condition of being turned into a sort of clock, and wound up every morning before I got out of bed, I should instantly close with the offer." Now there is many a priest with his confessional and many an ecclesiastic with his creed that are ready to undertake to do for men and women all that. But the price is that they shall become "clocks."

I once saw an interesting sight just outside the city of Rome. Dr. Whittinghill, our missionary there, had been showing me the catacombs and other things of interest that afternoon, and as we were returning he called my attention to a carriage in the road ahead of us and some personage of note dressed in a robe, with an attendant, walking a little in advance of the carriage. He explained that it was a cardinal who was out for his daily walk. "Now look," he said, "at that company of monks coming." They were coming to greet the cardinal. And as they approached from the other side of the road they filed across and got down upon their knees before him and kissed his ring. And then as I thought of that act of spiritual prostitution I saw much more. I saw the "mark of the beast." I saw a

great power professing to be religious but worldly and Satanic in nature, with a genius for organization and rulership that is the marvel of the centuries, that would demoralize the world, denature men and despiritualize Christianity. And I heard Jesus, triumphant in his temptation, commanding: “Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve.” (Matt. 4:10.)

Now we turn to the points of contrast between the kingdom of God and kingdom of the world. The unlikeness between them is suggested, as we have said, by Matthew’s favorite designation, kingdom of heaven, and is shown by many arguments to be very great.

An earthly kingdom must have territory. The kingdom of heaven has none.’

We are in the habit of saying that the sun does not set upon the kingdom of Great Britain. Her lands girdle the globe. Her extension in longitude and latitude is part of her greatness. Nothing is more biting to Germany in her present humiliation than the reduction of her territory. There may be a people or nation that has no country, but history knows no kingdom, nor democracy either, that has endured for any length of time without territory. But the kingdom of God has none and, what is more, it cannot be possessed of any. In the sense that it owns any limited piece of the earth’s surface it owns it all. That is, as a man or a nation owns land, the kingdom of God owns none and claims none. In another sense, however, it owns it all; for “the earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof.” But With possession in this sense we are not here dealing. It would not be possible to mark off any portion of the earth’s surface and confine within it or exclude from it the kingdom of God. It cannot be circumscribed or limited in such a way. It does not submit to such measurements. You can no more imprison the kingdom of God in

geographical boundaries than you can weigh a sunbeam. Consider carefully Luke 17:20, 21: “And being asked by the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God cometh, he answered and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you.” Nothing is more clearly affirmed in these statements than that it is impossible to locate or to localize the kingdom of God. We have heard of “geographical Godliness,” but only as a pagan superstition. (Cf. 1 Kings 20:23, 28.)

An earthly kingdom is an organization. The kingdom of heaven is not.

We used to say that Germany was the strongest kingdom on earth. We referred to the completeness and force of the organized government which constituted that kingdom. The kingdom of God is power but not physical force. It is life which may manifest itself in various organizations, but it is not itself an organization. It is not even an organism. There is no specific visible system of any kind that we can put our finger on and say, “this is the kingdom of God.”

On an Easter morning once I heard an eloquent priest preach on the relation of the Catholic church to Christ. The burden of his discourse was that the Catholic church is the body of Christ, and that for one to have fellowship with Christ he must come in contact with his body, the Catholic church. His assumption was that the grace of salvation is limited to a visible organization composed of men and controlled by them. But a church, or denomination, that identifies itself with the kingdom of God is an apostate church. That it does this is proof of its apostasy. In so doing, it dismisses the Spirit of God and bows to the visible and the human.

Dr. L. P. Jacks of Oxford has vividly described the constant gravitation in general toward idolatry. He says:

“A civilization not based upon wealth; a democracy whose ideal

is not the maximum of legislation but the minimum. Such is the dream. Can it be realized? In answer let me remind the reader of Plato's conception of the invisible state. The true state, according to Plato, is not only invisible now, but remains invisible forever. Its nature is to be invisible; it can never be otherwise. 'I do not believe it is to be found anywhere on earth,' says Glaucon at the end of the ninth book of the *Republic*. 'Ah, well,' answers Socrates, 'the pattern of it is perhaps laid up in heaven for him who wishes to behold it. ... And the question of its present or future existence on earth is quite unimportant.'

"But many people are not content with that. They insist on turning the invisible state into a visible one. They appear to think that so long as the state is invisible it is not real and does not work. It never occurs to them that in trying to make it visible they may do violence to its nature; so that it becomes not more real but less real and gets into a condition where it works badly or doesn't work at all. And yet I believe that such is often the case.

"We see exactly the same process at work in the history of religion. The mind of man has always kicked against the notion that the deity is invisible. The notion has been that a real deity, an effective deity, must be a deity that can be seen; that an invisible deity, if I may say so, is no good. Hence in the history of religions we can trace a process of turning the invisible deity into the visible one, and the process ends in setting up some wooden idol of the god, a thing one can see and feel and handle—a thing of which one can say 'there it is.' Then it is discovered that by making the god visible men have done violence to his nature. The visible wooden idol won't work. It can neither save nor help nor deliver. By becoming visible it has lost the attributes of God—and when that is discovered the idol is smashed."

History reveals how powerful and how successful was the

tendency to identify the kingdom of God with the visible thing called the Holy Catholic Church. It is an idol that the Reformation began to “smash.”

By what has been said I would not imply that the kingdom of God has no visible manifestations and creates no organization. It does. As light manifests itself, so does the kingdom of God. As life builds for itself organisms by means of which it comes in contact with the visible world, so does the kingdom. Life is not to be identified with its manifestations; it is much more than any of them and all of them. But life, potent life, seeks to manifest itself in visible forms, in some definite tangible organism or organization. It creates a “body” for itself. In the very nature of the case this body being more or less human is more or less imperfect. I am speaking of the actual body, not the revealed ideal for it in the New Testament.

The question of the relation of the kingdom to the church or the churches becomes, therefore, an important one. It is most vital. As suggested above, the identification of the former with the latter is one of the woes of the world. But the truer churches are to the ideals of life and organization revealed in the New Testament the more truly do they represent the spirit of the kingdom. But in New Testament times even members of local churches did not constitute all the saved. The very idea would be absurd.

Now we do find the word church used a few times in the New Testament as co-extensive with the kingdom. Hebrews 12:23 is an indisputable case. Matthew 16:18 is quite certainly another, and there are, it may be, several in Ephesians and Colossians. This is a very natural enlargement of the meaning of the word when it is remembered that the Greek word translated church, *ekklesia*, means a *calling out* or *persons called out*. All saved people or believers are called out from the world. They are a people separate and apart. Those that have not yet “passed on” are *in* the world but not of it.

Their “citizenship is in heaven.” (Phil. 3:20.)

It should be noted that this unusual meaning of the word church in the New Testament is wholly different and distinct from its common meaning, a local, tangible, visible body. It should not, therefore, lower our idea of the kingdom to what is earthly, but, on the contrary, heighten our idea of the church to what is heavenly. I repeat, the idea that all local churches, thought of as one universal church, as Augustine taught (*City of God*, 13:12), and exactly co-extensive and identical with the kingdom of God on earth, or all the saved on earth, is foreign to the New Testament and is fatal to the conception of the kingdom of God as a spiritual institution or movement. One needs to take but a passing glance at church history to see that this doctrine has been the curse of the Christian centuries. The greatest calamity that has ever happened to historical Christianity was the union of church and state under Constantine, the taking over by the state of those spiritual groups of men and women scattered about in the Roman Empire and causing them to become a part of the machinery of the government. In time the notion would naturally prevail and did prevail that the kingdom of God and the Roman government were one and the same. Hence there arose what history knows as the Holy Roman Empire. It is easy to trace many of the evils which to-day afflict even evangelical Christianity to this unholy alliance. It seems clear to me that this is the “falling away” and the “man of sin,” the “son of perdition, he that opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God or that is worshiped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God,” which Paul predicted would come and continue until Christ returns. (2 Thess. 2:3-12.) He saw “the mystery of lawlessness” already at work.

And yet, notwithstanding all the pure light that shines from the New Testament, and all the vivid lessons of church history, there are

some outstanding leaders of the various denominations now who advocate “national” or “indigenous” churches. They would lead us again into the ditch. They would turn the world back again to the dark ages. But they shall not succeed. Every leader of Protestantism that heads toward Rome will lose his following.

Some are saved who have no connection with any church at all, and some that are in the churches are not believers at all. Some are in the kingdom that are not in a church, and some are in a church that are not in the kingdom. But all that are saved are in the kingdom, and all that are in the kingdom are saved. These two circles are identical. This is a common truth to Baptist people and others who emphasize the difference between the outward and the inward, the formal and the spiritual; but to many it is a strange doctrine. To Catholics and to some Protestants Christianity is the same as “churchanity.” And to all such ecclesiastical succession from Christ and the apostles is essential.

When we attempt to set forth the relation between the kingdom of God and the churches we must consider that the word church has been prostituted to worldly if not vile uses. Some institutions that take upon themselves the name of the church are even opposed in spirit and purpose to all that the New Testament churches stood for. For example, a group of Christian Scientists calls itself a church. In Kansas City, Missouri, there is an institution that calls itself “the church of this world.” No word has been abused so much as the word church, unless it be the word Christian, and for the same reason, as one can readily see.

I think of the kingdom of God as a mountain range lifting itself high above the valley below which represents the world. God’s people are called to the higher life. They are lifted out of the lowland. They live on the heights. This is true of every saved person. It is not true of the man of the world. He lives in the

shadows and miasmas of the plane, because his idols are there. (Cf. Gal. 5:19- 24.) Now in every mountain range there are certain towering peaks that give shape to the general elevation. These are like the churches in relation to the kingdom of God. I mean New Testament churches, and such as partake more or less of their character. The more like New Testament churches they are in doctrine and life, the higher rise their summits and the greater is their power to lift up the entire mass.

When men are saved they become partakers of the love of God and look upon the world with the compassion of Christ and feel the need of association with others, who have had the same experience that they have had and who are moved with the same love of souls that moves them, they will immediately unite themselves in some kind of organization. The kingdom of God is life, and life everywhere produces organisms and manifests itself therein. That spirituality is small that, does not organize itself for self-propagation. The organism must suit the life, must in fact be created by it. Otherwise the life is not helped but hindered by it.

It is easy to see how blighting to the kingdom of God is any worldly organization that imposes itself, or is imposed by ambitious ecclesiastics, upon the kingdom of God. In so far as it succeeds it suppresses the kingdom. Imagine the young fruit on the apple stem inside a bottle where it must grow confined and cramped into an unnatural shape if it grows at all. It is a poor quality of apple that will be thus produced. Through the Christian centuries the state church and other organizations more or less pagan or worldly have compressed, crippled, dwarfed and deformed the kingdom of God. But in spite of them all it still lives and will in time break through all imprisonments.

This, as I see it, is the relation of the kingdom to the church or the churches. If they are independent groups of spiritual men and

women, voluntarily associated, free from all worldly entanglements, with a simple and flexible government and organization, adaptable to all climates and conditions of society, like New Testament churches, and consonant with the spiritual nature of the kingdom, they manifest the kingdom and extend it, though they are not coextensive with it. In so far as churches lack these qualifications, they hinder the progress of the kingdom and are no part of it.

In the organization of a church the so-called “law of parsimony” should operate. That is, the organization should contain only that which contributes to the extension of the kingdom. When I was a boy on the farm, we had this rule for buying machinery: Get the simplest kind that will do the work. Any part that is not needed is a burden. A local church is a machine to do the work of bringing in the kingdom. The nature of the kingdom determines the nature of the church. Since Christ is king in his kingdom the church is not a hierarchy. It has no legislative function. Since in the kingdom all Christians are equal, the church is a democracy, or, stated in another way, Christ only is its Lord. Anything in the organization of a church that does not contribute to these ends or obscures them is a nuisance. Again, the kingdom of God is essentially spiritual. Anything in the character of its organization that does not contribute to a spiritual result is a human impertinence.

In the New Testament, therefore, as in an ideal home, the visible features or marks of organization, that is, the organization itself, are reduced to a minimum. By organization I do not mean, and have not meant, the machinery that a local church may create and use for the prosecution of its work as the Bible school and young people’s society, but what is regarded as essential to the existence of a church or a denomination, as officers, ordinances, ministerial orders and denominational government.

One element in the strength of Methodism is this of which we

speak. In harmony with the decisive spiritual experience of its great founder it strives to make the local organization simple in form and subordinate to the spiritual nature of the kingdom, and accordingly to a great degree flexible and adjustable thereto.

The contrast between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, we may recall, was stressed by Jesus himself. To Pilate's question, "Art thou a king?" he answered in the affirmative. But, not wishing Pilate to misunderstand him or in ignorance condemn him, he explained: "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36, 37.) The point of contrast Jesus describes in two ways, negatively and positively. "If my kingdom were of this world," he says, "then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews." That is, force of arms does not belong to the kingdom of God. Jesus continues: "To this end have I been born, and to this end came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth." That is, the definitive quality of the kingdom of God is something moral, not something material. Jesus is talking, let us remember, to a pagan and uses the word best suited to convey to his mind the essential principle of his kingdom. "The truth" was a better verbal vehicle than gospel, or kingdom of heaven, to carry his thought to the mind of this Gentile skeptic; and Pilate did understand it sufficiently to sneer.

The attitude of Pilate may be regarded as typical of that of unbelief in general. It sees nothing in the spiritual kingdom. It is the world's attitude. What it can see and touch and use for its own advantage it prizes. What it cannot thus appropriate it despises.

It is said that Pompey, when he conquered the Jews and visited Jerusalem, demanded that he see the Holy of Holies of the temple, and when this was refused him went in by force; and that when he came out he was full of contempt for it all, saying it was nothing but empty space. We could not expect that it would have had any other

effect upon his pagan mind. He had no soul with which to appreciate the spiritual worship that was befitting the true and living God that dwelt there.

The world has no soul with which to appreciate the realities of the kingdom of God. For this very reason we should prize them the more.

“For ye are not come into a mount that might be touched, and that burneth with fire, and unto blackness, and darkness, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that no word more should be spoken unto them; for they could not endure that which was enjoined. If even a beast touch the mountain, it should be stoned; and so fearful was the appearance, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake: but ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel.” (Heb. 12:18-24.)

“Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet. 2:5.)

“But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that ye should show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; who in time past were no people but now are the people of God.” (1 Pet. 2:9, 10.)

In these quotations the writers are addressing Jewish Christians, not as members of a local church but as citizens of the kingdom of God. Their relation to the nation of Israel is thought of as nothing.

Being members of God's spiritual kingdom is the one thing to be valued.

We may well be on our guard in quoting Professor Harnack, but the following splendid utterance of his should be received gladly: "Certainly the task of the historian is difficult and responsible when he has to separate kernel from shell, what is inherited from what is original, in the preaching of Jesus about the kingdom of God. How far dare we go? We must not take from this preaching its native quality and color, converting it into a bloodless moral system. But, on the other hand, we must not lose its peculiar power by acting as those do who resolve the whole into a complex of contemporary fancies. The way in which Jesus himself distinguished among the ideas of his contemporaries, casting none aside in which there was a spark of ethical power; and adopting none by which the ambitious expectations of his fellow-countrymen would have been strengthened, proves that he spoke and preached out of a deeper knowledge than theirs. But we possess much more striking proofs. He who desires to know what the kingdom of God and the coming of this kingdom mean in the preaching of Jesus must read and ponder his parables. There it will dawn upon him what Jesus is thinking about. The kingdom comes when it comes to the individual, making entry to the soul which embraces it. The kingdom is the reign of God, no doubt; but it is God himself with his power. Everything dramatic, in the external and historical sense, here disappears, and the whole external hope of a future upon earth sinks out of sight. Take any parable you please— that of the Sower, or that of the Pearl of Great Price, or that of the Treasure hidden in the Field— and you perceive that the Word of God, or rather God himself, is the kingdom; and what you are reading about is not angels or devils, thrones or principalities, but God and the soul, the soul and its God." (*Essence of Christianity*, Third Lecture. Quoted

by Stalker, *Ethic of Jesus*, p. 26.) I would criticize adversely only a few points in this admirable statement.

CHAPTER 4 – THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF THE KINGDOM —Continued

Glorious things of thee are spoken
Zion, city of our God:
He, whose word cannot be broken,
Formed thee for his own abode;
On the Rock of Ages founded,
What can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's wall surrounded,
Thou may'st smile at all thy foes.
See, the streams of living waters,
Springing from eternal love,
Well supply thy sons and daughters,
And all fear of want remove;
Who can faint, while such a river
Ever flows their thirst to assuage?
Grace which, like the Lord, the Giver,
Never fails from age to age.

In the previous chapter we were concerned with establishing the fact of the spirituality of the kingdom. Now we wish to make this fact plain, inevitable and attractive; to show clearly that the essential qualities of the kingdom are spiritual qualities.

By spirituality I mean not ideality, but reality, reality that is invisible and moral, and more; I mean divine energy or quality or presence. I mean the realization of the purpose of God in the will and character of men. I want to show that the Bible requires this conception of the kingdom of God. In finding illustrations of it therein we find also further proof of it. We are not speculating nor

theorizing nor guessing; we are interpreting the Holy Scriptures and understanding the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is an invisible kingdom.

“And being asked by the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God cometh, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:20, 21.)

Whether the expression, “within you,” is the preferable rendering of the Greek, which seems to the writer to be the case, or whether the marginal reading, “in the midst of you” should be adopted, the force of the language of Jesus as bearing on the point before us is plain. There are no visible marks of the kingdom of God. It cannot be located nor localized. Of course, Jesus does not mean to say that the kingdom of God is in the Pharisees or that they are in it. The expression, “within you,” is to be taken as having a general or universal sense. It means that the kingdom of God is an “affair of the heart.” It has to do with thought and feeling and purpose and not with the physical man. It has to do with the “internal man,” not the “external man.” It is not to the point, which Jesus was making, to affirm that the kingdom was then present with them, which is of course implied in what he says, but to affirm rather that it cannot be seen. The translation, “within you,” is in stronger contrast with “observation” than “in the midst of you” would be. But in either case the invisible character of the kingdom is emphasized.

Writers and speakers used to distinguish often between the “church visible” and the “church invisible.” They had in mind the great truth that we are here dealing with. It is not difficult to apprehend it, but it is a great achievement to appreciate it. It is easy to see this diamond sparkling upon the ground. But most men pass on without any knowledge of its value. Could they trade it for gold they would eagerly pick it up. If it had commercial value, they

would even *dig* for it. But “gain is not godliness.” (Cf. 1 Tim. 6:5.)

When we consider the holy Trinity, to whose character the kingdom must conform and for the revelation and glory of whom it exists, we are the more able to appreciate the spiritual nature of it.

God’s nature is essentially spiritual.

“God is spirit.” (John. 4:24.) “Man shall not see me and live,” he said to Moses. (Ex. 33:20.) It is not a moral inability only that prevents man from seeing God but a natural inability also. God does not exist in a physical form which only can be discerned by the eyes. “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God,” said Jesus. (Matt. 5:8.) It is the spirit of man only, his understanding, his love, to which God can reveal himself directly and essentially.

We understand clearly, when we consider this fact, why the Bible burns in indignation against idolatry. It is a caricature of God’s spiritual nature. It is a travesty on true worship. The idea that it is a step in the evolution of the race is a modern invention and is not in the Bible. There it is always a sin; like the sin of profanity or worse. It is not the first rays or dawning of the morning; it is the pitch darkness of midnight. It points not to the evolution but to the fall of man. (Cf. Rom. 1:21- 23.)

I am looking at a great painting, the Ascension. It consists of three parts. Jesus is the center of the scene. He is rising in a glory of light, encircled with angelic figures, his countenance triumphant and peaceful and his hands outstretched to bless the disciples below. They are gazing upward in wonderment and worship. These two parts of the picture are perfect. They satisfy a devout imagination. But above is an attempted representation of the Father. It is a failure. No artist can paint a spirit. It is as impossible as it is to visualize a fourth dimension.

“God is spirit; and they that worship him, *must* worship him in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24.) He cannot be worshiped in any other

way.

Not only does idolatry dishonor God but its inevitable reaction is to dull and deaden the worshiper. One becomes like that which he worships. (Cf. Ps. 135:18.) As men understand God and think of him properly, they become enlightened and intellectually strong. The spiritual conception of God is the ground of progress. That is, the first and second commandments are fundamental in all human happiness, enlightenment and achievement. History is “establishing the works of the hands” of Moses. (Cf. Ps. 90:17.)

The nature of Christ, the king of the kingdom of God, is spiritual. It is essentially spiritual. His glory is a spiritual glory.

Christ is presented to us in three states, preincarnate, incarnate and present, in all of which his glory is a spiritual glory. As to the first this statement is necessarily true and needs no proof.

We need only to think for a moment of Christ “in the days of his flesh” to see that he puts emphasis always, in both precept and example, upon the spiritual. He regarded the material, the temporal, as but a means to an end. In fact, we may say that his resigning his pristine glory for a time was to teach us the pre-eminence of spiritual values.

I am sure no man ever touched the chords of human relationships with more gentleness than did this ideal man. It is certain that the ties of human affection never bound a man’s heart tighter to the loved ones of his family than they did the heart of this perfect son and brother. And yet we hear him crying: “Who is my mother, and my brothers? And looking round on those who sat about him, he says, Behold, my mother, and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother, and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:33-35.) No man, we may believe, saw the beauties of nature and of life in this world better than he; and yet in the prime of manhood, at thirty-three years of age, when conscious of power to bring the

world to his feet, he turned from its glory and voluntarily surrendered his life. He knew it has no lasting value; that its glory is but a “passing show.” So far as I can discover he did not rely upon a single worldly force to extend his kingdom. He never at any time appealed to an earthly or selfish motive. He “staked it all” upon the spiritual, spiritual ideals and spiritual forces. He believed in them. They were real to him. He looked at the soul of man not at his body. He was a Jew, but he knew neither race nor color. He would “break down the middle wall of partition” between Jew and Gentile. There is not the least doubt that this is the correct interpretation of the mind of Christ on this subject, radical and revolutionary though it is. All the wars and social miseries of our poor world have come because it has not been willing to acknowledge the truth and justice of this principle. It will never find peace until it does. It is useless and vain to say that the Golden Rule won’t work. *There is nothing that will work but the Golden Rule.*

Mr. Roger W. Babson speaks well and pointedly when he says: “Jesus was not interested in property, *per se*. There is no question, but that Jesus had no interest in property. These things which look so important to us—houses, roads, taxation, buildings, fields, crops, foreign trade, ships, —it is very evident were insignificant to Jesus. When any of Jesus’ disciples came to him to settle some property question, he pushed them aside, and said he was too busy to consider it. I am sure that if Jesus were here to-day he would tell us all that we are idiots for striving so to accumulate things—building ourselves bigger houses, getting bigger bank accounts and more automobiles.”

In this age when science is so much praised, we ought to consider that Jesus did not say a word about the steam engine or electricity. He did not even tell us that the world is round. I believe he knew about all these things and knew also that they would not heal the

world's hurt nor keep it free from pain and turmoil. By means of science the hell of war is made still hotter. But Jesus did know and did tell the world what would save it, if only it would hear and heed.

In his present exalted state Jesus is preeminently spiritual. Even his resurrection body is, according to Paul, a spiritual body. (1 Cor. 15:44.) He is now invisible. He is an "anchor of the soul, a hope sure and steadfast and entering into that which is within the veil." (Heb. 6:19.) As the anchor, when it holds the ship in safety passes out of sight, so Jesus, to save and keep the soul, has passed out of view into the holy place of the heavenly tabernacle. There he intercedes as a spiritual priest and reigns as a spiritual king. And such spiritual offices and functions are possible only in a spiritual kingdom. The vital relation of men to such a priest and king creates a spiritual kingdom.

The character of the Holy Spirit makes the kingdom of God a spiritual kingdom.

This is so apparent as hardly to need affirming. The day of Pentecost is one of the greatest of all days. It is an interpretation of Christianity. The Holy Spirit gives character to this age. "It shall be in the last days (last age of the world, this age in which we are now living, not the end of this age but from Pentecost on to the end) saith God, I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh." (Acts 2:17.) "Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you," Jesus said. (Acts 1:8.) Power for what? To bring in the kingdom. The power of the kingdom of God is a spiritual power. The one quality that characterizes it is spirituality. A kingdom that is created by spiritual power must be a spiritual kingdom.

When we consider the kind of people that constitute the subjects or citizens of the kingdom of God its spiritual nature becomes obvious.

The author of the Hebrews says that we believers, we saved

people, we Christians, “are not come to a mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire,” that is, Mt. Sinai, but that we “are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born (ones) who are enrolled in heaven.” (Heb. 12:18-23.) That is, the company of people to whom we belong have their names “enrolled in heaven.” This is a poetical and beautiful expression for being saved. The mark of salvation is on them, or rather, in them. It characterizes them.

Jesus said to Nicodemus: “Except one be born from above he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3.) Without this experience one cannot enter it, nor can he understand it. He may get into a visible church without being born again but not into the kingdom.

We have had much trouble with some foreigners who come to our country. We may expect more. There is one cause for it. We cannot impart to them the spirit of the United States. They are *in* our country but not *of* it. They have not surrendered their anarchistic ideas. They are not *converted* to our principles of government. They retain then- old prejudices and animosities against law and order. They are a menace to our institutions and to our peace. It cannot be otherwise, if we let such people live among us. What a blessing it would be if when they enter, we could convert them to our national views and ways; if we could regenerate them and baptize them in a political sense. But we cannot do this. All we can do is to look for a few external marks or belongings. We examine the immigrant’s pocketbook to see if he has a few dimes, or his eyes to see if he has a disease. Then we let him in or bar him out, as the case may be. That is as far as we, in our weakness, can go. We often send away the worthy and welcome the unworthy.

But God does not bungle in any such fashion. Everyone who gets into his kingdom is born again; he is a new creation. (Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15.) He is given a nature that corresponds to the institution or divine state into which he is initiated. He becomes a citizen of a spiritual kingdom and in the process is transformed into a spiritual man. Of the three adjectives, “carnal,” “natural” and “spiritual,” Paul uses the last only as the proper description of a Christian. (Cf. 1 Cor. 2:14, 15; 3:1.)

It ought to be understood, though it is not always, that when Paul speaks of salvation in terms of justification and adoption, he is not thinking of a formal or arbitrary salvation. (Cf. Rom. 3:24; 5:1, 18; 8:15; 1 Cor. 6:11; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5.) With justification or adoption there goes regeneration, just as with pardon there goes repentance. When God pardons sin, he creates hatred for sin. When he forgives, he also gives more grace, grace for right living. When the image of Christ is formed within reformation follows without. All this is beautifully illustrated in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Justification is the legal term corresponding to the social term, forgiveness or pardon, and both presuppose a change of thought, of feeling and of will; that is, a revolution of life. Unrighteousness has no place in God’s kingdom. It is a kingdom of light and not of darkness. (Cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11.)

God’s people love righteousness. Their zeal is a zeal for good works. (Titus 2:14.) “A scepter of rectitude is the scepter” of Christ’s kingdom. (Heb. 1:8.) The subjects of his kingdom have the spirit of their king. He loves righteousness and hates iniquity and so do they. (Cf. Heb. 1:9.) No Pharisee nor Sadducee, ancient or modern, is in the kingdom. (Cf. Matt. 5:20.)

God’s people are an unworldly people. They have the spirit of the patriarchs, who “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” (Heb. 11:13.) “They desire a better country, that is a

heavenly.” (Heb. 11:16.) “Our citizenship is in heaven.” (Phil. 2:20.) God’s people are people of faith. (Cf. Gal. 3:7, 26.) They believe in what they do not see. To them it is the unseen world especially that is real. They live in the future as well as in the present; and they have good reason to. They have an inspiring hope and a rational basis for it. Christians are all practical idealists. Like good sailors they have their eyes upon the stars. Like Moses they “endure as seeing him who is invisible.” (Heb. 11:27.)

All such qualities are spiritual qualities and belong only to spiritual people.

Not only must one be born of the spirit and have a spiritual nature in order to enter the kingdom of God, but he will also, by breathing the atmosphere of the kingdom and engaging in its activities, grow into a higher degree and a more perfect state of spirituality. The kingdom exists for this purpose. It is God’s garden in which saints are grown. It is God’s city where he is building temples of Christian character. It is God’s factory where he is producing holy men. Now spiritual men and holy men are one and the same. To be in God’s kingdom, therefore, is to be spiritually minded and to become more and more so. The spiritual man is in the kingdom and the kingdom is also in him.

It is said that Plato put up over the door to his lecture hall a notice like this: *No one should enter here who is not versed in geometry.* Plato considered geometry to be the best discipline to prepare the mind to pass from the material world to the ideal world. As one enters the kingdom, he receives a spiritual nature. But God’s kingdom on earth is the best discipline for the kingdom that shall be. None will enter into it there who has not experienced it here.

Once more. The Christian has a certain relation to Christ. The spiritual man and the idealist are not one and the same. The spiritual man is not simply a worshiper of God. He is a worshiper of God as

he is revealed in Christ. Christ is the standard, the test, of spirituality. Paul affirms boldly: “No one speaking in the Spirit of God says, Jesus is accursed; and no one can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit.” (1 Cor. 12:3.) That is, a man is to be judged as spiritual or not according to his attitude to Christ. If he is against Christ, he is not spiritual, nor is he fit for the kingdom, it matters not for what else he may qualify. He may be scientific, philosophic, idealistic, even religious, and still not be spiritual. It is said, for example, that the great Franklin was religious and the proof offered is that he had the following creed: “That there is one God who made all things; that he governs the world by his providence; that he ought to be worshiped by adoration, prayer, and thanksgiving; that the most acceptable service of God is doing good to man; that the soul is immortal, and that God will certainly reward virtue and punish vice, either here or hereafter.” Now it is true that one who believes these six propositions is a religious person. But it takes something more to make him Christian or spiritual, and that is, accepting Christ as his Lord. Those philosophers who heard Paul in Athens believed all these propositions, except possibly the fourth one, and were in fact “very religious” but with Jesus Christ, the resurrection and spirituality, of which we speak, most of them would have nothing to do.

Sometimes we wonder whether certain people are Christians or not. We cannot tell absolutely, and it is not our business to tell. We judge by appearances only. God knows. “Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his: and let everyone that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness.” (2 Tim. 2:19.) Let that suffice while we wait for “the revealing of the sons of God.” (Cf. Rom. 8:19.)

The method, by which the kingdom is propagated shows that it is a spiritual institution.

Some years ago, when a beloved pastor was conducting a revival meeting with me in Canon City, Colorado, we took a walk together in the Royal Gorge. We talked about the visible wonders of nature and of the invisible wonders of the kingdom. As we held different views upon the subject of the millennium the conversation began to run in this fashion:

“Your idea of the millennium is that Christ in personal and visible presence will rule the world, having a central city or seat of government and from thence enforcing his will completely throughout the world, is it not?”

“Yes.”

“Your belief is that Christ will then not use the moral suasion method in establishing his kingdom, as he is doing now and has been doing for nineteen centuries, but will do it by force of some kind?”

“Yes.”

“But when Christ was on earth, he refused to make use of force. Did he not tell Peter to sheathe his sword? (John 18:11.) Did he not say to Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36), meaning thereby that the element of physical power was foreign to its nature?”

“Yes.”

“Jesus was then defining the nature of his kingdom and said that force did not belong to it. So, it never will belong to it. The essential quality of the kingdom of God on earth then is the essential quality of it now and ever shall be. Do you not see that your idea of the millennium is impossible? That you must either change your doctrine of the kingdom or your doctrine of the millennium?”

He was silent for a time and in profound meditation, but he did not answer further. He could not. He is an honest thinker.

There is only one place where persons do by force the will of

God, and that is in hell. It is impossible to build the kingdom of God by force. The method and the result do not harmonize. If I hold the Bible in one hand and a pistol in the other and say to my victim, "take your choice," he may take the Bible, but it is certain that this process does not bring the kingdom to him nor him into the kingdom. If there is a sack of flour to be lifted up on the table I may sit in my chair and think, think intensely and powerfully, but it will have no effect upon the sack of flour. There it is on the floor and will continue to stay there until I take hold of it and apply the force of my muscle to it. I get a physical result by using physical power. I get a moral and spiritual result by using moral and spiritual power. Christians are converts, not victims. They are believers, not cringing slaves. An autocracy can be extended by force. A democracy cannot. To try to do it is a violation of its very genius. Its members come into it or stay in it as a result of their own choice. The kingdom of God is in this respect a democracy. This is without question the lesson taught in the parable of the Tares. Jesus is there speaking, not against church discipline, but against persecution. It is taking Christendom a long time to understand this.

There is only one way by which to make Christians and that is by "moral suasion."

Consider the motives to which the gospel appeals. They are reason, conscience, fear, love, and such like motives. There is not a low motive to which it appeals. It appeals to fear but not, however, as a supreme incentive. Fear is instinctive, rational and ethical. It has a place in the development of character. One who has not fear is dull, too dull to be saved. Those teachers and preachers that say the appeal to fear is unethical understand neither human nature nor the kingdom. Jesus Christ had something to say about hell and its torments and I think he knew what he was talking about. But fear alone will not save the soul. It is the "beginning of wisdom," not the

end of it. You cannot *scare* a man into the kingdom.

The gospel is “the appeal to reason.” It has the “promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come.” (1 Tim. 4:8.) So, our first duty is to *teach* men. The gospel is light. No one becomes a Christian without using his understanding, nor does he grow in grace without growing also in knowledge. From the moment in which one falls asleep to the moment in which he awakes he makes no progress in piety.

If there be such a thing as a “nation being born in a day” (Cf. Isa. 66:8), in the sense of all its people being saved, that is, becoming Christian in twenty-four hours, it must be by an individual and voluntary “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 20:21.) Men and women cannot be made Christian by governmental decree. Christians cannot be manufactured wholesale. Human souls do not come into God’s kingdom in this way, as they do not come into the world in this way. It is simply not God’s method. Souls cannot be dealt with in the mass. Wherever found they require individual and personal treatment. Those who talk about a future time when a whole nation will in twenty-four hours become, as by magic, Christian, ought to learn these three things: the real meaning of the passage in Isaiah referred to, the laws of human nature, and the laws of the kingdom.

In this connection we may with profit consider *the place of miracles in kingdom propaganda*. As to present-day miracles I do not accept them. I believe in prayer, and that God answers prayer objectively, but not in a miraculous way. I believe in regeneration and in God’s gracious dealings with the soul. I believe in his presence and providence and all his glorious goodness. I have no theory at all that would prevent him from working miracles now if he wants to. I often wish he would and at times wonder why he does not. But I never saw a miracle and the claims made for modern

miracles do not convince me at all. As to these I am like David Hume. It is easier for me to believe that all claimants to them are deceivers or deceived than to believe that what they testify to did really happen. I leave it to the unscientific, the superstitious, the sensational, the neurotic and the religious fakirs, to prattle about present-day miracles. They have done so from Joseph Smith on down to the present. But I notice that all spiritual men, all men of mental balance, who are bringing in the kingdom, who believe also in prayer and God's vital presence, never claim to work miracles. Witness Carey, Judson, Spurgeon, Moody and all others.

But when it comes to the miracles of the Bible, I believe them all. I have no trouble in accepting the account of Jonah as literal history. Since I believe in the resurrection of Christ and a personal God, all miracles of the Bible are credible and reasonable, in fact, natural. We must, however, consider that miracles, as properly defined and as I speak of them, are the exception not the rule. A miracle is God's condescension to man's need. It is worked to help his faith. If he does not need such help the miracle is not forthcoming. Where it is not needed it would do harm rather than good. Its ethical effect would be injurious. So, Jesus at times refused to work miracles. So, he said: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead." (Luke 16:31.) Suppose a man should say, "I will believe it is wrong to lie if you will work a miracle." Would a miracle really help him? Suppose a little infidel in school should say, "I will believe in the law of gravitation, if you will bring the moon so close to the earth that I can touch it." Would that help him a bit? He needs another kind of treatment. The mental, moral and spiritual condition of those who dote on modern miracles is proof of what I argue.

The kingdom's appeal is to the conscience. It is said of Frederick W. Robertson, the eloquent preacher of Brighton, England, that,

when young and in the throes of doubt, he wrote: “I doubt everything except the moral beauty of Jesus Christ. I cannot doubt that.” And this call of his conscience saved him. Christ is the beauty of the world. He is the embodiment of all that is pure and good. All that love righteousness come to him. All others are repelled. The miracles of the Bible are fitted to and contribute to its moral message.

We can readily see the importance of self-denial in Christ’s kingdom. The worldly-minded, the self-seeking, the ambitious, the greedy, the low and materialistic do not belong to it and cannot get into it until all these desires are gotten rid of. When those, whom he had fed the day before, came to him in Capernaum, seeking another “free meal,” Jesus told them what they needed was not food for the body but for the soul; that they needed to receive *him* and *his truth*. But when they heard this they turned and went away. He disappointed them utterly. They had been hoping to make him their king, since, he could furnish them food without work, but now he “spoiled” all that. They had no time for anything spiritual. (Cf. John 6:22-66.) It would be well for all to know that what some are wont to call the “social gospel” is not the gospel of grace and salvation but a gospel of sordid selfishness. I think Jesus, if he were here now, would say to such people, as he did then, what would drive them away. He cannot use worldlings. He really does not want them and will not have them as they are. They must be born again. It is better that they go away unless they repent. Christ does not count heads; he considers hearts. “The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 14:17.)

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good into

vessels, but the bad they cast away. So, shall it be in the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. 13:47-50.) Of course, it is not meant that the wicked are really caught in the kingdom’s net but that they appear to be. But the time is coming when they will be made manifest and classified properly, according to their moral nature. Jesus had just before taught the same truth in the parable of the Tares. (Matt. 13:24-30; 36-43.)

Behold the mongrel mess we call Christendom! It is a mixture of the clean and the unclean. Behold that ecclesiastical misnomer that is called “the church”! No fisherman’s drag-net ever brought up creatures more “common or unclean” than we find in Christendom and “the church.” These are mere names that cover both the good and the bad. But into God’s kingdom the pure only can come, and we know that he knows who are his own.

In the contrast drawn in the Bible between the two covenants, the old covenant of works and the new covenant of grace, the spiritual character of the kingdom is revealed.

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them forth out of the land of Egypt; for they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and on their heart also will I write them: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.” (Heb. 8:8-10.)

The author of the Hebrews, quoting this prediction from Jeremiah, explains that the first covenant had to do with “carnal ordinances” and the second with the “conscience.” (Heb. 9:10, 14.)

The purpose of the old was ceremonially to cleanse the body, the purpose of the new was really to cleanse the soul. The first dealt with the physical, the second deals with the spiritual. By the first the temporal kingdom of Israel was built up; by the second the eternal kingdom of heaven is built up.

This truth came to the disciples very slowly. Naturally it was very difficult for them to understand that Christ did not come to build again the national kingdom of Israel but to build the spiritual kingdom of God. Even after the resurrection, after Jesus had been with them for forty days, “speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God,” they with a persistent dullness ask, “Lord dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:3, 6.) How earthly, how trivial, is that question! It is difficult for these men to appreciate the fact that the old covenant, together with the old order, is passing.

In the unfolding and development of this truth in New Testament history, or in the realization of it by the apostles and other leaders, three decisive events are to be noted.

First, the definite teaching of Jesus as to clean, and unclean meats. After Jesus had explained to the Pharisees and scribes that not what goes into a man’s mouth in the form of food, but what comes out of his heart in the form of evil thoughts, defiles him, the writer adds: “This he said, making all meats clean.” (Mk. 7:19.) That is, Jesus, there and then, abolished the ceremonial law concerning clean and unclean foods. This would carry with it to its death the distinction also between Jew and Gentile and, consequently, the whole Mosaic ceremonial system. But the disciples did not as yet even suspect that a result so radical and far-reaching was possible. It was, however, soon to follow.

Secondly, the case of Cornelius. Notwithstanding the teaching of Jesus just cited and his command to make disciples of all nations,

the first Christians did not for a time get their bearings. They were under the delusion that the Gentiles must first become Jews before they could become Christians or even have the right to hear the gospel. (Cf. Acts 11:19.) God's word to Peter concerning Cornelius, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, while Peter was speaking, upon him and the company in his house, as they were, Gentiles and not Jews, cleared up the whole matter. Gentiles could be saved without becoming Jews. The conversion of Cornelius is one of the great events in the development of the gospel. Much is made of it. (Cf. Acts 10:1-11:18; 15:7-11.)

Thirdly, the Council in Jerusalem. This, too, was a momentous event. The very truth of the gospel was at stake. Some who were counted believers were talking in this fashion: "True, the Gentiles can believe without becoming Jews but after they believe they must become Jews." This was a vital issue. According to these Judaizers Christ is but a schoolmaster to bring us to Moses. Paul saw that the truth of the gospel was involved in this question. (Cf. Gal. 2:5.) His view was the very opposite, namely, that Moses is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. (Cf. Gal. 3:24.) So, he went to Jerusalem to consider it with the apostles, the elders and the whole church there. Paul says that he "went up by revelation" to confer with them on the subject. (Gal. 2:2.) The account of the council is given in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts. Paul also in the second chapter of Galatians recounts some interesting facts concerning it.

Keep in mind that the question before the council was definitely and specifically this: *Are Gentiles believers to be required to keep the ceremonial law of Moses?* The Judaizers raised the issue squarely when they said: "It is needful to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses." (Acts 15:5. Cf. 15:1.)

Peter spoke first and referred to what God had taught them by the case of Cornelius, concluding that they should not "put a yoke on

the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.” (Acts 15:10.)

Then Barnabas and Paul spoke, showing how God had by “signs and wonders” approved the gospel to the Gentiles.

Then James, who, it seems, was the moderator of the meeting, spoke making an argument from a prophecy of Amos and formulating a statement of opinion which was unanimously adopted by the council. Let us study carefully what he says:

“Simeon (that is, Peter) hath rehearsed how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written:

“After these things I will return, and I will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men may seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who maketh these things known from of old.

“Wherefore my judgment is, that we trouble not them that from among the Gentiles turn to God; but that we write unto them, that they abstain from the pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from blood. For Moses from generations of old hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.” (Acts 15:14-21.)

In this summary of the speech of James there is no reference whatever to the second coming of Christ. He has no thought at all of that event. He is addressing himself to the question before them, namely the relation of the Gentile converts to the ceremonial law of Moses. He is interpreting a prophecy of the Old Testament and showing how it was in his day being fulfilled and not making prophecy. Anyone who will look into the matter carefully can easily see that this is true.

He quotes from Amos, chapter nine, verses eleven and twelve. To

understand the tenses of the verbs in the quotation from Amos, we must put ourselves in the time of Amos, not in the time of James. James does not say that God says to him, “After these things I will return,” etc. James says that the prophets of old said that God then said that to them; and, singling out the prophecy of Amos, he quotes from him as representing the others also. James understands that what God said to Amos is in the time of the New Testament being fulfilled. “To this agree the words of the prophets,” he says, and then quotes the passage from Amos. The prophecy in Amos agrees to what? To the fact of the conversion of the Gentiles, illustrated in the case of Cornelius, as just related by Peter. Therefore the statement, “I will return and I will build again the tabernacle of David,” is a prediction by Amos, and in substance by others also, of the building up of God’s spiritual kingdom which was then going on by the coming of the Gentiles into it, as Peter and Paul and Barnabas have just been relating. Notice that Amos says specifically that God’s name will be “called upon the Gentiles”; that is, that they will become his people. How any interpreter can make out of this passage a prediction by James that, in a time future to him, and also to us, God will restore the temporal kingdom of Israel is amazing. Did he ever stop to ask what right he has to make “the tabernacle of David” mean the nation, or kingdom, of Israel? It is absurd. Nor can it mean the temple, for the temple in a state of glory and power was then standing nearby in the city. Besides there was no temple of David. “The tabernacle of David” in this connection signifies, not the kingdom of David, but the spiritual presence, or kingdom of God. (Cf. Isa. 16:5; Ez. 37:27; Heb. 8:2; 9:11; Rev. 13:6; 15:5; 21:3.) The language of Amos is not “After these things I will return and,” but “In that day I will raise up,” etc. James is quoting freely. “I will return” is a beautiful poetic expression descriptive of the Messianic hope that runs through the Old Testament. James, I think,

purposed to convey the idea that such divine insight into the Christian age was shared by other prophets also. I repeat, James uses the word “return” to interpret the inspired thought of Amos with reference to what was future to Amos, and not to convey any thought of his own with reference to what was future to him, concerning which he says nothing. James is here an inspired interpreter of Scripture, not an inspired foreteller of future events. He is giving the thought of the prophets in a word often used by them. When applied to men it often meant to repent; when applied to God it usually, if not always, meant to visit, to bless, to deliver, to show mercy, to meet men with forgiveness in response to their repentance, to save. (Cf. Gen. 18:10; Deut. 30:3; Ps. 90:13; Isa. 35:10; 63:17; Jer. 12:15; Mal. 3:7.)

What conclusion did the council come to? They agreed with James and sent letters to the believing Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia to this effect:

“Forasmuch as we have heard that certain who went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls; to whom we give no commandment; it seemed good unto us, having come to one accord, to choose out men and send them unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who themselves also shall tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that ye abstain from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from fornication; from which if ye keep yourselves, it shall be well with you. Fare ye well.” (Acts 15:24-29.)

Notice that not a single one of the ceremonial requirements of the Old Testament is made binding on the Gentiles. Why? Because these requirements do not belong to Christianity and the kingdom.

They tell the Gentiles that their lives must be clean in matters of religion, food and sex, and with that they stop. Purity of worship, cleanness of sex relation, and sanitary food are spiritual and moral, not ceremonial, obligations. Notice that it is stated that the Holy Spirit approves the decision. (Acts 15:28.)

This position was nothing new to Paul. He had been preaching it all the time. The apostles and the church in Jerusalem had understood it also since the conversion of Cornelius. Their communication says that those who went out from them and taught the contrary had no authority from them. But it was worth much to Paul and the cause of Christianity to have the doctrine passed upon formally and confirmed by the apostles and the whole church in Jerusalem. So, Paul used the decrees or decision of the council to confirm his converts in the kind of gospel he had preached to them. (Cf. Acts 16:4.)

We may then with the best of reasons affirm that not a single ceremonial requirement or observance of the Old Testament is brought over into the New Testament. It would have been much better for Christianity, if this truth had been accepted by all. But the Judaizers would not accept it and kept up their fight on Paul, who became, rather than Peter, the great champion and defender of the gospel of salvation by faith without the works of the law. The center of the controversy was circumcision. Paul said it did not save. His opponents contended that it did. Paul said this view would destroy the gospel which is salvation by the free grace of God. Paul saved Christianity. But the Judaizers had a powerful influence and set in motion a movement that spread itself as a dark cloud over the kingdom of God, whose black shadows still darken the world. It seems that Paul saw it beginning to form. (Cf. 2 Thess. 2:3-12.) He called it the “mystery of iniquity.”

Roman Catholicism is a product or combination of three

elements, Christian, Jewish and pagan. It has a reason for exalting Peter over Paul. It has a reason for its priesthood, its holy water, its holy days, its celibacy, its monasteries, its convents, its robes, its altars, its images, its sprinkling, its purgatory, its sacraments, and its prayers for the dead. The second and third elements are always prominent. The first is usually submerged. Catholicism is Christianity minus spirituality, instead of and as a counterfeit for which it has superstition.

This contest, which Paul waged against the Judaizers and which the reformers later waged against Catholicism, is the contest of the ages. It is the contest of the spiritual against the carnal. It is the contest of truth against error. It is the contest of the kingdom of God against all foes, who would destroy it or obscure utterly its spirituality. Enoch, Noah and Abraham saved the situation in their days; Moses did in his day; John the Baptist did in his day; Paul did in his day; Martin Luther and others did in their day. But the Reformers did not make their victory complete. They that come out of Babylon should “come clean.”

In our day also there are many spiritual influences and spiritual men and women whom God will use to save his kingdom from the “gates of hades.” With great distinction the people called Baptists have stood and are now standing bravely in the breach. Repudiating every vestige of the Old Covenant, for example sprinkling, and all works of righteousness, as sufficient to save the soul, for example baptism; hating all forms of idolatry, even Bibliolatry, but affirming the infallibility of the Word of God; holding tenaciously to the number and form of the New Testament ordinances but emphasizing their significance as symbols only of spiritual truth; accepting the Bible as the one standard of faith and conduct for both individuals and churches, but relying upon the Holy Spirit as an inward interpreter of its truth; believing that Jesus Christ is the rightful ruler

of all men and that every knee should bow to him, but believing also that the souls of men are sacred and that they should have the right to decide for themselves before God alone all matters of the conscience; impelled with a deep conviction that they should organize and build up churches according to the pattern shown them in the New Testament but moved also with charity for all who may differ from them in these matters and all matters; they are making their contribution to the spiritual kingdom of God, and thus to the progress of the world.

With a love that does not fail they pronounce upon all believers Paul's benediction: "Peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God."

CHAPTER 5 – CHRIST NOW ON THE THRONE

BEHOLD THE KING

We have said that humanity always seeks a king.

The Man of Galilee, at the close of his career, standing before Pilate, says with regal dignity and majesty:

I am a King, and every true man is my subject.

He is indeed a King—morally a King, intellectually a King, every inch a King.

His kingdom is almost worldwide.

The highest geniuses of earth bow before him.

The greatest poets in the world praise him.

The best of art is his.

The noblest of architecture is his.

The gems of literature are his.

The loftiest music of the ages is his.

Countless millions of human hearts are his.

Ecce Homo.

Ecce Deus!

Ecce Rex!!

—George R. Wendling.

Christ is now king. He is now on the throne. He is now reigning. The kingdom of God is not a future hope only; it is a present reality.

Some do not have this view of the matter. They think the kingdom is yet future. They explain that Christ intended to set up his kingdom when he was on earth but, on account of the unbelief of the Jews and his rejection by them, he deferred the event to some future date. This age is the age of the church and not of the kingdom, they hold. Rev. W. E. Blackstone, Dr. A. C. Gaebelien and Dr. James M. Gray advocate this view.

Rev. Mr. Blackstone says: “He (Jesus) would have set up the kingdom (Matt. 23:37-39), but they rejected and crucified him.” “Thus, the kingdom came nigh unto the Jews, who spurned it, and while it waits God visits the ‘Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.’” (*Jesus Is Coming*, pp. 87, 88.)

Dr. Gaebelien, in a lecture that I heard, said: “Christ was in the bosom of the Father; then he was at his right hand; he will be on the throne.” He makes a distinction between Christ being at the right hand of the Father, where he is now and being on the throne of the kingdom, which is yet future, he thinks.

Dr. James M. Gray, defining the “characteristic of this age,” says: “It is different from any age preceding it, or to follow it. It is not the age of the kingdom, but the age of the church.” (Tract, *The Present Age*, etc.)

The above three men are ministers of influence. Many follow them. They represent a large and increasing group of Bible students. They belong to the conservative wing of Bible interpreters of the present day and are reverent and devout. I shrink from making an issue with them. But I must do it. I wonder that men of their learning and piety can stand for such a doctrine. If some enthusiastic young man, who has read only one class of Biblical literature but who has not yet learned how to understand even the phraseology of the Bible, should, in want of experience and balance of judgment, take up with this theory, I would not be so surprised. But that such men as these should do it is strange indeed.

We must, therefore, look into the question carefully. Let us use all possible patience. Let us speak kindly and make fair arguments.

First of all, we should ask, what do we mean when we say that Christ is now reigning?

If we mean that all persons do his will, then he is not reigning, for not all persons do his will. If we mean that all persons, or some

persons on earth, do his will perfectly, then he is not reigning, for no one on earth attains to absolute perfection of character before God. If we mean the personal presence of Christ on earth and the enforcement of his will throughout the world from some central seat of government, as was done by King David over Israel and a limited portion of the earth's surface, then he is not on the throne, for he is not on the earth in this sense nor is he enforcing his will upon men in this way. If this is what is meant by the kingdom of God on earth, then it must be a condition yet to be realized. It does not exist now, nor has it ever existed. This is the idea of the kingdom that the interpreters quoted have in mind.

But if the kingdom of God means the reign of Christ, and if the reign of Christ means his enthronement in human hearts, his being loved and obeyed, his principles and ideals being accepted; if it means that he is worshiped and given his rightful place to a greater or less extent in the lives of men and women, then Christ is now on the throne and the kingdom of God is now in the earth. Now this, I affirm, is exactly what we mean by the kingdom of God; it is nothing more and nothing less than this. The will of Christ is the law of the kingdom. Where his will, which is God's will, is done there is the kingdom. In the model prayer, which Jesus gave to the disciples, the two petitions, "thy kingdom come" and "thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth," mean the same. (Matt. 6:10.) The latter is an explanation of the former. "A log with Mark Hopkins on one end and an apt pupil on the other is an ideal college," said Garfield. The saying became famous because there is much truth in it. God on his throne in heaven and one true worshiper on earth, his footstool, make the kingdom of God. God is always on his throne in heaven. Therefore, whenever and wherever we find men and women on earth doing his will, then and there we find his kingdom. The more numerous such men and women are the greater is his kingdom.

When Abel by faith offered an acceptable sacrifice to God then the kingdom of God began on earth. (Cf. Heb. 11:4.) The circle that includes all human beings on earth, who worship him in spirit and in truth, is the boundary of his kingdom now on earth. This proposition is so simple and so self-evident that we may say it *must* be so. Rebels are not in his kingdom; all subjects are. When Jesus said to his disciples, in the Sermon on the Mount, “Seek ye first his kingdom,” he did not mean that they should seek to get into it, for they were already in it; but he meant that they should seek to extend it. He had been speaking of the worldly purposes of men and of the impossibility of their having two primary motives in life and concluded: “Seek ye first his (our heavenly Father’s) kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things (temporal needs) shall be added unto you.” (Matt. 6:33.) “First,” is to be understood as pointing to importance and not to time. What is of primary importance, however, should come first in point of time also. If the kingdom is not in existence in our age this command of Jesus had no meaning for the disciples and can have none for us. Jesus commanded them and us to do what, in the very nature of the case, is impossible. That is, Jesus told them and us to extend his kingdom when he knew it did not exist and would not exist for eighteen hundred years and more. An institution that does not exist can neither be entered, nor extended.

As we saw above concerning the two petitions in the model prayer, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,” that they are two expressions of the same thought, so here, “his kingdom and his righteousness” are two expressions that in this connection mean the same. Where the kingdom is, there righteousness is; and where righteousness is, there the kingdom is. To extend the kingdom is to increase righteousness in the earth. It would be very difficult to tell what business a Christian has on earth if it is not the building of the

kingdom of God or the creating of a reign of righteousness on earth. This is “not the age of an ingathering, but the age of an out-gathering,” says one. But that is mere logomachy. Coming out of the world and coming into God’s kingdom are one and the same. Coming out of the world means simply turning away from its thoughts and ways. It means repentance and righteous living which is nothing else than entering the kingdom of God and obeying its laws, laws that are not written on tablets of stone but upon the heart.

Having made these preliminary statements to explain what we mean when we say that Christ is now on the throne or that the kingdom is now on earth, in which there is also some proof of these propositions, we now take up the line of argument.

There are many passages in the New Testament in which the kingdom of God is thought of as already in existence and in which Christ is represented as possessing and exercising royal authority and power.

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews?” (Matt. 2:1-2.)

In some way these men from a foreign country knew that a king was born. They knew it in the same way in which they knew that they should come to Jerusalem to inquire where he was; they knew it in the same way in which they knew that he was or was to be king of the Jews. God told them. The chief priests and scribes also knew where this king was to be born, found it in prophecy and told the Wise Men, who went to Bethlehem, found him, worshiped him and gave gifts to him. (Cf. Matt. 2:1-12.)

Three times in Matthew we have the statement: “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (3:2; 4:17; 10:7); once in Mark we have, “the kingdom of God is at hand” (1:15); and twice in Luke we have, “the kingdom of God has come nigh.” (10:9, 11.) In all these six cases

the Greek verb is the same and the literal translation is, “the kingdom of heaven (or God) has come near.” Now does it mean near in the sense of a little distance off or in the sense of actually present? I hold that the latter is the necessary meaning in all six cases. Some have thought that, when John calls upon the people to “repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near,” he must have meant only that it is approaching and is close at hand but not right at hand. If so, what is the meaning when Jesus calls for repentance on the same ground and tells the apostles, and later the seventy, to make the same plea? Does Jesus call the Jews of his day to repentance on the ground that the kingdom of heaven is drawing near when it was eighteen centuries and more distant? This has been affirmed but it is absurd. Look at the simple language. It is not, “repent that the kingdom may come.” It is not, “the kingdom has approached near and will arrive and manifest itself, if you will repent.” The idea is that the kingdom has already arrived and therefore you should repent. The verb is in the perfect tense; it designates completed action or state. In Mark the fuller statement is: “The time is fulfilled (perfect tense), and the kingdom of God is at hand.” That is, the old dispensation is ended and the new is now here. Mark’s record opens thus: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, God’s Son.” Then follows the account of John the Baptist. With the preaching of John the Baptist, the kingdom began or received new impulse and power. The gospel is the gospel of the kingdom. Compare Matt. 4:23; 11:12; Luke 4:43; 16:16. In some cases in the New Testament the verb translated, “is at hand” or “is come nigh,” or “has come near” *must* mean, not approaching close but actually arriving. Consider Matt. 21:34; Luke 18:40; 21:8; 24:15; James 4:8. All this is simple and natural.

Jesus often spoke of the kingdom as a thing already in existence and himself as then possessing the authority of a king.

“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force.” (Matt. 11:12.) Whatever this passage means, and the meaning is not difficult to find, it is clear that Jesus conceives of the kingdom as then in existence. In the parallel passage in Luke he says, “and every man entereth violently into it.” (Luke 16:16.) This clinches the argument.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5:3.) (Cf. Luke 6:20.) They possess the kingdom, or it possesses them. Where we see the “poor in spirit” there we see the kingdom. Jesus meant to attribute this quality to his disciples, considering them then as in the kingdom.

“It is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again, I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” (Matt. 19:23, 24.) Jesus was speaking of the kingdom as an institution into which one could then enter and not as something yet to be. The disciples so understood him and understood also that entering the kingdom was the same as being saved; for they ask in great astonishment, “Who then can be saved?” (Matt. 19:25.) Consider also Matt. 21:31; 23:13; Mark 9:47; 10:15; 12:13; Jno. 3:5.

“There are some here of them that stand by, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power.” (Mark 9:1. Cf. Matt. 16:28; Luke 9:27.) The point of emphasis is not that they *will in the future* see the kingdom, though Luke’s language may seem to give this sense, but upon the fact that it will come *with power*, that is, be signally manifested. So, Matthew says, “till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” The thought is evidently just this: In a few days some of you will have the privilege of seeing me glorified in a wonderful way, revealing me as the master of my kingdom. All three synoptics follow the language of

Jesus with an account of his transfiguration, specifying that it took place a week later. It is, therefore, clear that by the kingdom of God coming “in power” Jesus means simply his transfiguration; not the initiation of his kingdom but a demonstration of it. Just a little while before Jesus had said to Peter: “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 16:19.) He will prove that he has the right to make such a claim and give such a promise. The two events are to be connected. That is, Jesus regards his kingdom as already in existence. (Cf. Luke 22:18.)

“If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you.” (Matt. 12:28.) (Cf. Luke 11:20.) Here the language leaves no room for escape. He does not say that the kingdom is *near to them* but *upon them*. The actual presence of the kingdom is affirmed.

“Blessed is the king that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from the multitude said unto him, Teacher, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones will cry out.” (Luke 19:38-40.) Here Jesus’ disciples hailed him as king, and he approved it. He said, moreover, that such a greeting must be given him; that nature would extend it to him, if men did not. Notice it is not a prediction that they are making but heartfelt praise that they are uttering. They say that he is a king and he justifies them. He was then a king and he knew it. Compare Mark 11:10, where they praise also the “kingdom of our father David.” These Galileans have spiritual insight. They understand that David’s kingdom is now again “set up.”

“Henceforth ye shall see the son of man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Matt. 26:64.) Jesus had just confessed to Caiaphas that he is the “Christ, the Son of God.” He follows up that confession with this prophecy and claim

of divine position, honor and authority. But notice that he does not say that royal place and power are to be bestowed upon him in the future but that “henceforth,” *from now on*, they will see him thus exalted. Compare the parallel passages, Mark 14:62 and Luke 22:69. Jesus is referring to the demonstration of his resurrection and ascension. There is no doubt at all about the correctness of this interpretation. The expression “coming on the clouds of heaven” is not descriptive of his second coming and should not suggest it. Jesus would not explain nor reveal that glorious future event to a murderous unbeliever and judge, who did not believe in his first coming. The language resembles that of Daniel, 7:13, “The son of man came with the clouds of heaven,” which Prof. Driver understands to be descriptive simply of one “in super-human majesty and state.” Into such a state Jesus did, immediately after his rejection by the Jews, enter. Their unbelief and rejection of him did not delay his enthronement but were steps to it. Their wicked purpose and deed God used to accomplish his “determinate council.” (Acts 2:23.) Compare also Mark 16:19.

“And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the king of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest.” (Luke 23:3.) The most important issue in the trial of Jesus before Pilate was whether or not he was a king. The Jews accused him of making the claim that he was, and he confessed it and affirmed it. The superscription on his cross was: “*This Is The King of the Jews.*” (Luke 3:38.) What they mockingly said was true. Paul said that Jesus “before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession.” (1 Tim. 6:13.) That confession was that he was then a king. (Cf. John 18:37.)

“All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth.” (Matt. 28:18.) If this language does not describe the honors and office of a king, no language could be found to do it. Jesus did not predict that such authority would be given him in the future but said

that it had already been given to him. He is declaring to them what has been proved to be true by his resurrection and appearances. He is explaining why he has the right to give to them the great commission, the most audacious and the most sublime campaign ever imposed by a king upon loyal subjects or daring soldiers.

Jesus, speaking from the throne of power on high, when he sends his last messages to the churches, says: “He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my father in his throne.” (Rev. 3:21.) The tenses of the verbs make it impossible to construe the aorist “sat” as a future act vividly conceived as complete. It points back to the same time that the aorist “overcame” points back to, that is, to Christ’s triumphant death and resurrection. It was then that he ascended to the throne and received the crown.

Paul and other writers also of the New Testament, spoke often of the kingdom as in existence in their time and conceived of Christ as then reigning.

“Walk worthily of God, who calleth you into his own kingdom and glory.” (1 Thess. 2:12.) He thinks of the Thessalonians as now in the kingdom.

“The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.” (1 Cor. 4:20.) Paul is thinking of the power of the kingdom as manifested in true believers in the church at Corinth, as it had been manifested in his preaching among them and will be demonstrated by him should he visit them again. Can we suppose they had this quality of the kingdom and not the kingdom itself? Are they partakers of its power and not partakers of it?

“The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 14:17.) Paul is exhorting Christians in Rome to befitting conduct. This plea could have weight for those only whom he considered, and who

considered themselves, to be in the kingdom.

“Who delivered us out of the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love; in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins.” (Col. 1:13-14.) These verses hardly need a comment. Paul counts himself and those to whom he writes as having already been “translated into the kingdom of the Son” of God, which is the same as having redemption or the forgiveness of sins.

“He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet.” (1 Cor. 15:25.) Paul thinks of Christ as now reigning. Not all acknowledge him as king, but he reigns nevertheless. There are enemies but in time they will be conquered. And when Christ’s purpose is accomplished, he will turn over his kingdom, or subject it, himself and all, to the Father. This is what he plainly affirms. (1 Cor. 15:27, 28.)

“Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1). Paul affirms that Christ was, when he wrote, “seated on the right hand of God.” He affirms the same fact in Rom. 8:34 and Eph. 1:20. The author of the Hebrews has the same conception of Christ and uses the same kind of language repeatedly. Consider 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2. In these six cases the statements are that Christ: “is at the right hand of God”; was “made to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places”; “sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high”; “sat down on the right hand of God”; “hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Peter, too, says that Christ “is on the right hand of God.” (1 Peter 3:20.)

Stephen in his great address says: “I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.” (Acts 7:56.) This, of course, means that Christ has already been invested with royal power and not that he is waiting to receive it as some have

foolishly fancied. To hinge an argument on the word “standing” and to contend that Christ is not yet “seated” on the throne, as some critics are doing, is the result of an unfortunate slavery to words. They ought to study more the Scriptures, English grammar and the simple rules of rhetoric. It is to be regretted that any interpreters of the Bible, with many of its passages before them affirming that Christ is on the throne, should continue to affirm that he is not.

In addition to the passages in the Hebrews already cited, in which the author affirms that Christ is at the right hand of power, consider this one also in which the author thinks of the kingdom as a reality in his time with a foundation that is immovable: “Wherefore receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe.” (Heb. 12:28.)

There are many other passages that bear on this phase of the subject and force us to the same conclusion. If the student wants to pursue the investigation further, he may consider Matt. 13:38; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:16-23; Eph. 5:5; Acts 1:3; 20:25; 28:23.

We come now to consider briefly certain prophecies of the Old Testament relative to the kingdom of God and to Christ as king that were fulfilled in time of the New Testament.

His very name, Messiah or Christ, meaning the “anointed one,” given him by his disciples and approved by him (Matt. 16:16, 17), signifies prince, ruler, king.

“But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel.” (Mic. 5:2.)

This is a prophecy of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem as king. The Wisemen asked, “Where is he that is born king of the Jews?” Herod asked the chief priests and scribes, “Where the Christ should be born?” They pointed to this passage in Micah. It is clear that

Matthew approves their conclusion. (Cf. Matt. 2:1-12.)

Above we pointed out that Jesus was greeted and hailed as king by his disciples upon the occasion of his entrance into Jerusalem at the beginning of the Passion Week, and that he approved the reception given him and the manner of it. Matthew says of this event: “Now this is come to pass that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying:

“Tell ye the daughter of Zion Behold thy king cometh unto thee, Meek and riding upon an ass,

And upon a colt the foal of an ass.”

— (Matt. 21:4, 5.) (Cf. Zech. 9:9 and Isa. 62:11.)

The prophecy of the Old Testament that recognized Jesus as king was “fulfilled,” Matthew says, when Jesus was on earth. We ought to listen to Matthew.

In the second Psalm we read:

“Why do the nations rage,

And the peoples imagine a vain thing?

The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder And cast away their cords from us.

Yet have I set my king Upon my holy hill of Zion.” (Ps. 2:1-6.)

Luke tells us that the disciples applied this prophecy to Herod and Pilate, the Gentiles and the Jews in their condemnation and crucifixion of Christ. (Acts 4:25-28.) Jesus is not in a future day to be crowned king in Zion; he is now king in Zion. In the eternal purpose of God before the worlds were made, he was anointed king, in the time of his earthly ministry he was established as king, and since then he has been winning subjects into his kingdom. Read all of the second Psalm.

“Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever:

A scepter of equity is the scepter of thy kingdom.” (Ps. 45:6.)

The author of the Hebrews applies this to Christ as an already accomplished fact. (Heb. 1:8.)

“The Lord saith unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, Until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” (Ps. 110:1.)

Peter in his sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:34) and the author of the Hebrews (Heb. 1:13) apply this passage to Christ as true in their day. And what is more, Jesus applied it to himself. (Matt. 22:43-45.) The thought is that Jesus is on the throne and is now reigning while his enemies are being subdued. Compare 1 Cor. 15:25.

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will perform the good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and concerning the house of Judah. In those days, and at that time, I will cause a branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name whereby she shall be called, the Lord our righteousness. For thus saith the Lord: David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel; neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt offerings, and to burn oblations, and to do sacrifice continually. And the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah, saying, thus saith the Lord: If ye can break my covenant of the day and my covenant of the night, so that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured; so, will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me.” (Jer. 33:14- 22.)

Take note of the following simple points concerning this prophecy:(1) It is a blessing for both Judah and Israel. (2) When once it comes it is to abide. (3) The blessing is designated as a son of David who will “reign upon his throne.” (4) He is described as a

“branch of righteousness” and the character of his government is described by the expression, “The Lord our righteousness.” (5) As a result of the reign of the son of David “Judah will be saved” and “Jerusalem shall dwell safely.” (6) As there is a king to reign continually so there is a priest to offer sacrifices also continually. (7) The increase of the “seed of David” and of the “Levites” is to be beyond numbering or measuring.

The passage is, of course, Messianic. When Christ comes, he will sit on the throne of David and his reign once begun will continue without a break. Christ also is the priest who will continue to officiate. Christ is a king forever as he is a “priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” The “seed of David” and the “Levites” are one and the same, namely, Christians. Peter calls believers a “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9) and twice John calls them a “kingdom and priests.” (Rev. 1:6; 5:10.) (Cf. Ex. 19:6 where there is probably the original basis for the conception.) It is a prophecy of Christ as king and as priest and of the increase and blessedness of his spiritual kingdom. It cannot refer to the return from captivity in Babylon nor can it refer to the second coming of Christ. Has this prophecy been without fulfillment for twenty-five centuries? Did Christ begin to reign and then abdicate the throne? When he comes again will he set up the priesthood also, in his own person or in the person of another? The idea is absurd, I care not who champion it. The epistle to the Hebrews makes it impossible.

“And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David prince among them, I, the Lord, have spoken it. And I will make with them a covenant of peace and will cause evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell securely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the

places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in its season; there shall be showers of blessing.” (Ez. 34:23-26.) Read also Ezekiel 34:12-16.

This prophecy also is clearly Messianic. “David” is here the prophetic designation of Christ, as “branch” and “son” of David are in the passage from Jeremiah. Jesus is beautifully described as shepherd, but he is also designated as prince, or as one having royal authority.

In the above passages “Zion,” “my holy hill,” “my hill,” “Judah,” “Jerusalem” must be understood figuratively or symbolically or spiritually, as “Mount Zion” in Hebrews, 12:22, must be. The writer of the epistle really says so.

“In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand forever.” (Dan. 2:44.) Read also Daniel 7:13, 14.

That this is a Messianic passage predicting the Christian age there can be almost no doubt in the minds of those who believe in the inspiration of Daniel. The claims of Jesus for himself before Caiaphas (Matt. 26:64) and before his disciples (Matt. 28:18) resemble Daniel’s description of the king of the “everlasting kingdom.” (Dan. 7:13-14.) The Revelator’s description of Christ and his kingdom resembles in several instances Daniel’s language in the passage cited. (Cf. Rev. 11:15; 12:10; 5:9, 11, 13; 15:3.) So also does the language of Gabriel to Mary concerning Jesus. (Luke 1:33.)

Thus we see that Micah, David, the author of Psalm 45, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah had visions of Christ in his first coming as a king: and that the New Testament itself states definitely that this is the interpretation to be given to the predictions of four of these prophets, David, the author of Psalm 45, Micah and Zechariah.

The idea that Jesus intended to set up his kingdom on earth, but on account of being rejected by the Jews changed his plan and deferred its establishment to a future date, should not be entertained for a moment. Did their unbelief and madness make void the purpose of God? Does the eternal and glorious purpose of God depend upon the will of man? Far be it. God, on the contrary, makes “the wrath of man to praise him.” Christ’s being rejected by the Jews, and Gentiles, too, was the very means God used to establish his kingdom.

“The stone which the builders rejected,
The same was made the head of the corner;
This was from the Lord,
And it is marvelous in our eyes.” (Matt. 21:42.)

Jesus quotes this prophecy from Psalm 118:22, 23 and applies it to himself and the leaders of the Jews. That is, the Jews’ rejection of Christ did not defeat the purpose of God but caused it to be realized. Peter also tells the leaders of the Jews, who were the crucifiers of Christ, that this prophecy applies to Christ and to them. (Acts 4:11.) In his first epistle Peter again makes the same use of this prophecy, adding that to those that believe the stone is “elect, precious,” but to the unbelieving and disobedient it is a “rock of offence”; and he affirms that they were appointed to this very thing. (1 Peter 2:6-8.)

Paul in his address to the Jews and others in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia says: “For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him.” (Acts 13:27.) This is like Peter’s statement on the day of Pentecost, that Jesus “being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay.” (Acts 2:23. Cf. 4:27, 28.) Paul, speaking of the unbelief of the Jews, says: “For what if some disbelieved? Shall their disbelief make void the faithfulness of God? Far be it.” (Rom. 3:3,

4.)

It was God's plan that Christ should be the chief cornerstone in his temple. The builders said they would not have it so. God, the great Architect, said: "By your very wilfulness and disobedience I will cause it to be so." The purpose of God to "set his king upon his holy hill of Zion" was not changed at all. It was fulfilled perfectly.

Christ is prophet, priest and king.

He is the world's teacher. He is truth and wisdom. When men stop and listen to him and learn from him, they find the way of life. He has ever been the world's teacher. But in the "days of his flesh" he was manifested as such. He is now the world's teacher. Though the Jews and the Gentiles did not receive him, he is, nevertheless, the "light of the world." He never resigned this office.

He is a priest, an eternal priest, "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek," "having neither beginning of days, nor end of life." Christ as the great high priest of spiritual things now officiates in the "holy place," that is, in heaven itself, making intercession for us, as the Hebrew high priest did for the nation of Israel on the great day of Atonement. He has not resigned this office, either. It matters not if the nation of the Jews does not receive him as such. Does their unbelief make of no effect the purpose and decree of God? Let one who is confused on this subject read and understand the epistle of the Hebrews, and he will rejoice in the illumination he finds there.

So also, Christ is king now and has been since he entered upon the office. Where is the proof or the faintest intimation that he abdicated the throne or was forced out of office? Who was strong enough to do it? Was he weak? Did he fail? Isaiah did not so see him. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he has set judgment in the earth; the isles shall wait for his law." (Isa. 42:4.) "Therefore, will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong." (Isa. 53:12.)

Reason also compels us to conclude, since these offices are in nature what they are that Christ in order to function in the first two, must function also in the third. If he is now the prophet and priest of his people, he is now also their king. In fact, in Hebrews often Christ's priesthood involves his kingship and the thought of the one glides naturally into the thought of the other. (Cf. Heb. 1:3; 8:1, 2; 10:12; 12:2.) It is impossible for Christ to be such a priest as he is described as being in the Hebrews and not also be a king. "A priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 5:6), that is, an eternal priest who is also an eternal king of righteousness and of peace. (Heb. 7:1-3.)

We need to enlarge our conception of Christ.

Many Christians in their thinking limit Christ. When I was a young Christian I did so more than I do now. It seemed to me then that he ruled in the religious sphere but had nothing to do with, or was impotent as to, any other. But "his kingdom ruleth over all." (Ps. 103:19.) "He is before all things, and in him all things consist." (Col. 1:17.) "Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden." (Col. 2:3.) "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in him ye are made full, who is the head of all principality and power." (Col. 2:9, 10.) "Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever more, and I have the keys of death and Hades." (Rev. 1:17, 18.)

For a long time, it was difficult for me to understand Rev. 5:1-14. Why was it such a great achievement to open the seals of the book? Why could Christ only do that? I think I see it now. The thought is very beautiful. The book is the record of future history. He only can open the book, or reveal future history, who is able to make future history. It is a picture of Christ as one who directs the course of events of the world. History is Christ's way of doing things. For

tools he uses the forces of nature and men, both subjects and rebels.

David was anointed first in secret by Samuel. It was God's anointing. Then followed years of trial and training in which he revealed his fitness for the office. Then Judah anointed him and proclaimed him king. And after a time, Israel in turn also anointed him and made him their king. (Cf. 1 Sam. 16:13; 2 Sam. 2:4; 5:3.) They saw his worth and gave him his rightful place. By the purpose of God and by his merit he won the crown.

In the secret and eternal purpose of God Jesus was anointed king. In the course of time he showed himself worthy and revealed his kingly character. He paid the price and it is his right to reign. More and more believing men and women anoint him secretly in their hearts and publicly put the crown upon his head. An ever-increasing host on earth and in heaven are saying:

“Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory, and blessing.” (Rev. 5:12.)

By God's eternal decree, by his own infinite merit, by the acclaim of numberless angels and saints, he is now
King in heaven and on earth!

CHAPTER 6 – SOME DIFFICULTIES IRONED OUT

Jerusalem, the golden,
With milk and honey blest!
Beneath thy contemplation
Sink heart and voice oppressed;
I know not, O I know not
What joys await me there;
What radiancy of glory,
What bliss beyond compare.
They stand, those halls of Zion,
All jubilant with song,
And bright with many an angel,
And all the martyr throng;
The Prince is ever in them,
The daylight is serene;
The pastures of the blessed
Are decked in glorious sheen.

No doubt the reader has felt, as we have proceeded, some difficulties in the way of adopting, as confidently as he may have wished to do, some of the views set forth in the previous chapters. The writer has been aware of these difficulties. They are real difficulties and should be faced and fairly dealt with. At this point in the discussion it seems best to attempt to “iron out” certain of these difficulties, and thereby suggest principles and methods by which most of them, if not all, may be cleared up.

1. There is a difficulty that is general and common to all

philosophy, metaphysics and psychology. *It is the limitation of human thought.* It is felt by the child keenly when he first faces the fact of mind. I myself remember experiencing it. I have noted the perplexity of my children as they came to this important step in their mental development. But with it comes a heightened sense of personal worth and dignity.

The kingdom of God, as we are interpreting it, is in this respect like philosophy, metaphysics and psychology. We must be able, if we would understand it, to pass from the material to the spiritual. Every Christian is capable of doing this. His experience of becoming a Christian fits him for it. But this does not make all things clear. There will continue to be hard problems to solve. It took time for the apostles to understand the nature of the kingdom. It is to a great degree a matter of spiritual development. The first disciples were greatly helped by the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost but after that remarkable experience they had much also to learn about the kingdom.

2. *Finding suitable words to express the truth is a great difficulty.* It is a problem that is created not only by the limitations of language itself, but also by the limited vocabulary of the speaker and the hearer.

Jesus felt the weakness of words to express the nature of the kingdom, when he asked: "How shall we liken the kingdom of God? or in what parable shall we set it forth?" (Mark 4:30.) Its truths he described as "mysteries." (Matt. 13:11.) Every missionary who translates the gospel into a heathen tongue realizes the force of what is here said. Students of psychology who have gone far into the subject know that many words used to designate mental states and acts were originally used for physical states and acts and that on this account it is difficult and sometimes impossible to make these words, weighed down with suggestions of the physical, convey the

exact idea as to the mental. One element of greatness in the late William James was his ability to coin or combine words so as to overcome this difficulty. Certain ancient metaphysicians complained of words and said that they obscured their thoughts rather than illumined them; that they concealed rather than revealed the truth of which they were speaking. They insisted rightly that we should pay attention to the thought rather than to the words. Words should be “signs of ideas,” suggestions of truth, and not its imprisonment nor its obscuring. This weakness of words, observed by interpreters of the ideal world, is felt especially by interpreters of the spiritual world. Paul called Christ the “unspeakable gift” of God. (2 Cor. 9:15.)

Consider the very important Christian doctrine of love. The Septuagint translators and the New Testament writers did not use the common Greek noun for love but used *agape*. This word became the common Christian term to express the conception of love that is essential to the kingdom of God. Evidently there were suggestions in the common Greek noun for love, *philia*, that the writers of the New Testament wanted to avoid. The same is true in a less degree of the common New Testament verb for love, *agapao*, which also was uncommon in classical Greek.

But it is evident that the use of new words, and the popularizing also of uncommon or rare ones, must be sparingly indulged in. Advocates of new and strange ideas must make out the best they can with the vocabulary that is at hand. It is not their business to create a new language, but to translate their thoughts into existing languages. The result is that some words in the Bible are made to do new duty. They are adapted to a spiritual service. Paul says that he selected spiritual words for his spiritual message. That is, he used the words of the Greek language that would best convey spiritual ideas. (Cf. 1 Cor. 2:13.) We may not be able to overcome entirely this difficulty

but to be aware of it will be a great help.

3. We come thus naturally to a third difficulty, *the problem of figurative language in the Bible*.

Two extreme positions must be rejected, namely, that there are no figures of speech in the Bible and that all statements of the Bible have a double sense, a literal meaning and a spiritual meaning both. The first theory will lead us nowhere; the second theory will lead us anywhere. The first theory is the result of mental crudeness; the second theory is the result of a spiritualizing mania.

The Bible contains figurative language. It makes use of symbols. Some statements have a double sense, or more than one application. Some must be understood spiritually and not literally. "Let the Bible say what it wants to say and let it mean what it says," is a dangerous rule. It will land us in the ditch. This is a better motto: "Let the Bible say what it says and let it mean what it wants to mean." Often, we meet figures of speech in the Bible and when we do we ought to interpret them as such. Figurative language is natural. We all make use of it. If the Bible did not contain such language it would be, not a supernatural book which it is, but an unnatural book which it is not. Jesus often used figures of speech. He said: "This is my body." (Matt. 22:26.) But he did not mean for us to take that literally. He said: "My flesh is meat indeed and my blood is drink indeed." (John 6:55.) But when his hearers became confused as to his meaning he explained to them that his language was not to be taken literally. (Cf. John 6:63.) He said that John the Baptist was Elijah. (Matt. 11:14; 17:12.) But he meant, of course, that John the Baptist, coming "in the spirit and power of Elijah," was the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy that Elijah must again appear. (Mal. 4:5; Luke 1:17.) It would be useless to multiply instances of this kind which could be produced without limit not only for Jesus, but also Peter and John and Paul. If one will study his own speech in this respect,

he will see how often he uses language that must not be taken literally, how a literal interpretation of what he says would be a rude injustice to him.

Some men are too severely mathematical, too prosaic, too bereft of imagination to understand aright much of the Scriptures. They remind me of the mathematician who was impatient with all poetry to whom his friend, an enthusiastic admirer of poetry, was reading favorite selections from Tennyson. When he got to the lines in the *Charge of the Light Brigade*, which run,

“Half a league, half a league, half a league onward,
Into the valley of death rode the six hundred, . . .

it was too much for his mathematical friend, who broke in with disgust: “If the fool wanted to say a league and a half, why didn’t he say it!”

Now in the Bible there is fine rhetoric and fine poetry as well as fine logic and fine prose. He is a sinner who does not interpret every kind of language according to its nature, as it ought to be interpreted, logic as logic, prose as prose, poetry as poetry, rhetoric as rhetoric. There are symbols that must be interpreted as symbols. There are allegories and types and parables that must be interpreted as allegories and types and parables, and not as other kinds of statements are interpreted.

One says: “But is there not danger in treating some of the language of the Bible as figurative? May not one be dogmatic in deciding what is figurative or literal? May he not use it as a method by which the truth of God’s Word is explained away?” Yes, there is danger in it, and some have in this way set aside the truth of God’s Word. But it is a proper method, nevertheless. Those that abuse it, upon them be the blame! Not upon those that use it lawfully. Upon these be the blessing! There is danger in many things that are good and necessary. There is danger in talking, in walking, in eating, in

fact in living. Let the interpreter be careful about saying a given passage is figurative. His conscience ought to be active as well as his exegetical faculty. But the interpreter who says it is not figurative ought to have his conscience in good working order, too.

What, after all, is language? It is the highly developed art of the use of signs or symbols. All words are but signs of ideas. The distinction between literal and figurative language is often a matter of degree. In translation, in exegesis, in interpretation, in application, in all handling of the Word of God, we are put upon our honor and should use both our wisdom and our conscience.

We must not go further into the inviting field of the science of hermeneutics. It was necessary to go thus far in order to make clear some things already said and also to prepare the way for what is now to follow.

In the very nature of the case we should expect to find the kingdom of God spoken of in figure and symbol. When we understand the character of the kingdom, we see that figurative language is not only proper but necessary. We are often shut up to it. It is figurative language or silence.

Consider such psychological terms as perception, perspective, conception, apprehend, comprehend, sub-conscious, attention, intention, impression, impulse, understand, recollection, imagination, affection, emotion, ecstasy, idea, etc. They were at first figures of speech. Why did psychologists use them? They had to. They had to use such terms to describe mental processes and states or not talk about the mind at all. They elected to talk. Men inspired of God also chose to talk about the kingdom. They did the best they could, considering the limitations of thought and of language and the nature of that concerning which they spoke. The kingdom of God is "difficult to define," says Prof. G. B. Stevens, "not because it means nothing in particular, but because it means so much."

Let us examine some specific examples. The more natural process and also the easier one for us is to work from the New Testament back into the Old.

Such use of language is frequent in Paul. He writes to the Philippians: “Beware of the concision: for we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh.” (Phil. 3:2, 3.) He thinks of Christians as spiritual Israel. Paul understood circumcision to be an outward sign of inward faith. Abraham, he said, “received the sign of circumcision (circumcision as a sign), a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision.” (Rom. 4:11.) Explaining more fully, he says: “He is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men but of God.” (Rom. 2:28, 29.) So, he writes thus to the Colossians: “In whom (Christ) ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ.” (Col. 2:11.) This figurative use, or spiritual adaptation, of the word circumcision is not a new thing in the New Testament. It is found in the Old Testament. (Cf. Jer. 4:4.)

In all these passages the thought is really very simple; it is this, that the true Israel of God is not the nation of the Jews but the people that believe, both Jews and Gentiles. God’s people are not determined by any mark of the flesh but by a mark of the soul, their faith. (Cf. Rom. 4:9-17.) Consider again: “Neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision but a new creature. And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” (Gal. 6:15, 16.) To Paul those who are “new creatures” in Christ constitute the “Israel of God.” All descendants

of Jacob constitute “Israel after the flesh.” (1 Cor. 10:18.)

The transition of Paul’s thought is from carnal circumcision to spiritual circumcision, from carnal Israel to spiritual Israel; just as in the evolution of psychological terms the process is from the material to the mental. But the point for us to note is that the kingdom of God must be identical with spiritual Israel. Let us hear Paul again.

“Tell me ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, one by the handmaid, and one by the freewoman. Howbeit the son of the handmaid is born after the flesh; but the son of the freewoman is born through promise. Which things contain an allegory: for these women are two covenants; one from Mount Sinai, bearing children unto bondage, which is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to the Jerusalem that now is: for she is in bondage with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother. For it is written,

Rejoice thou barren that bearest not;

Break forth and cry, thou that travaileth not:

For more are the children of the desolate than of her that hath the husband.

Now we brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But as then, he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, so also it is now. Howbeit what saith the Scripture? Cast out the handmaid and her son: for the son of the handmaid shall not inherit with the son of the freewoman. Wherefore, brethren, we are not children of a handmaid, but of the freewoman.” (Gal. 4:21-31.)

This passage hardly needs a comment, but notice “Mount Sinai,” “Jerusalem that now is” and “Jerusalem that is above.” This last answers to or rather is, the kingdom of God. “Jerusalem that now is” answers to Hagar and her son and is “cast out.” That is, it is the spiritual kingdom that God receives and blesses; the national

kingdom of the Jews he rejects; that is, the Jews as a nation God casts away. (Cf. Rom. 11:15.) As a nation they have served their purpose. God does not need them anymore. Jesus said of the “Jerusalem that now is”: “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” (Matt. 23:38.) The Jews as a nation are now like the scaffolding of the house when the house is completed. It is pulled down and carted away. God cares for the Jews as individuals and wants them to be saved, but as a nation he has no more purpose with them, unless it be to use them as a sign. The people of the Jews are no longer Israel. They have become as Hagar, as Sinai. As a nation they are a thing of the past and will ever remain so. Hear Paul yet again:

“For not all they are Israel, who are of Israel; neither, because they are Abraham’s seed, are they all children; but (as is said in Gen. 21:12) in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, not they who are the children of the flesh are children of God; but the children of the promise are reckoned as seed.” (Rom. 9:6-8. Cf. Gal. 3:7.)

“Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom. 11:5). Paul is speaking of that part or remnant of the Jews who believe. They with the Gentiles who believe constitute the true Israel of God. (Cf. Zeph. 3:13.)

Accordingly, when Paul says, “And so all Israel shall be saved” (Rom. 11:26), he can mean only spiritual Israel. With Paul “saved” signifies not restored to their land as a nation, but redeemed, delivered from “ungodliness” as the context shows. Only Jews who believe in Christ turn from their ungodliness. If one understands Paul to mean that all the descendants of Jacob are saved in the sense of having their sins forgiven and going to heaven, he makes Paul state what is contrary to fact; for, for eighteen centuries, they have been living in unbelief and dying in sin. In this sense not all the Jews will be saved and not all have ever been saved. But in this

sense, all the true Israel of God have been, are and will be saved. Paul's only hope for the Jews is that "some" of them will be saved. (Cf. Rom. 11:14; 1 Cor. 9:22.)

Peter also considers that Christians make up God's "holy nation." Contrasting believers with unbelieving Jews, he says: "But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." (1 Peter 2:9.)

The gospel itself is connected essentially with the distinction that is here insisted upon. John the Baptist said to his hearers: "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." (Matt. 3:9.) That was an interpreting note in his message.

Above we quoted a passage in Galatians in which Paul speaks of the "Jerusalem that is above" as "our mother," that is, as the kingdom of God. It is a beautiful conception and is natural in our worship and devotional literature. There is another word of similar history and the same delightful suggestions, the word Zion. When we sing "The Holy City" and "Zion Stands with Hills Surrounded," our spirits soar aloft on wings. We do not need an explanation of our mental processes or of the theology involved. When we sing these songs, we are necessarily orthodox. They are natural and inspiring to the Christian faith and vision. We are not thinking of the actual city of Jerusalem and its mountains at all. We are thinking of the kingdom of God. We can sing these songs here in America, we who have not seen Jerusalem, as well as if we were in the city and perhaps a little better than if we were there. Now this transition in thought from Jerusalem, or Zion, the earthly, to Jerusalem, or Zion, the heavenly, was natural and common in the writers of the New Testament as it is in devout worshipers of the present time.

Let us look at a few more passages containing these noble names,

especially Zion. (1) It was first the name of one of the mountains of Jerusalem, where David lived and where he had the seat of his government, and where also he pitched the tent for the ark, before the Temple was built on Mount Moriah. (2) Naturally in the development of the nation it came to signify the land of Palestine and the people of Israel. (Cf. Ps. 9:14; 137:1, 3; 149:2; Isa. 41:27; 51:3, 16; 52:1, 2, 7; Jer. 4:31; Mich. 1:13.) (3) Then it came to mean the “Israel of God,” the redeemed, the saved, those that constitute the kingdom of God. These terms, Jerusalem and Zion are “twin sisters”; as respects the second and third uses assigned to Zion, they are synonymous; they are often found together in Old Testament parallel statements, where either may have the meaning of the other.

Consider first an indisputable case in the New Testament. We have used it before, but it serves our purpose perfectly again here.

“For ye have not come to a mount that is touched and burning with fire, nor to blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they who heard entreated that no word more should be spoken to them; for they could not bear that which was charged, Even if a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned; and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I am terrified, and trembling. But ye have come to mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn (ones), who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men perfected; and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaks better than Abel.” (Heb. 12:18-24.)

This passage is both simple and conclusive. If we desired to do so, we could not get loose from its grip. “Mount Zion,” “the city of the living God,” “the heavenly Jerusalem” and “the general assembly and church of the firstborn (ones),” all mean the same,

namely, the saved, the redeemed, the spiritual people of God, his kingdom. This is so obvious that it needs no proof. But let the reader consider how far-reaching this fact is. I am thankful that I had occasion years ago to study carefully the book of Hebrews. That study has helped me very much to understand the doctrine of the kingdom.

Consider a case from Peter:

“Behold I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious;
And he that believeth on him shall not be put to shame.”

(1 Pet. 2:6. Cf. Rom. 9:33.)

It is not absolutely certain, but probable, that Zion here has the third meaning assigned to it. It is certain it is not the first. The second meaning is possible. The stone then would signify Christ as being, according to the flesh, a Jew. A “stone laid in Zion” could point to salvation coming from the Jews, as Jesus explained to the woman at Jacob’s well that it does. (John 4:22.)

This idea, so far as the mere words are concerned, is expressed more plainly thus by Paul:

“There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer: He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: And this is my covenant unto them When I shall take away their sins.”

(1 Pet. 2:6. Cf. Rom. 9:33.)

But since “Jacob” here, it seems, signifies spiritual Israel, Zion would naturally mean that also. Again, consider that Zion in both passages is not thought of merely as the sphere of salvation, but as the source of it. The “Deliverer” shall “come out of Zion” in the sense of being “produced” by Zion. This is certainly the conception here. Now it was not carnal Israel, but spiritual Israel, that is, the kingdom of God, that produced Christ in the sense here thought of. In Rev. 12:1-6 we have this exact conception of the relation of the kingdom of God and Christ under the symbols of a “woman arrayed with the sun” and her “son, a man child, who is to rule all the

nations with a rod of iron.” The “son, a man child,” is, of course, Christ. The “woman arrayed with the sun” is not Mary, the mother of Jesus, but the spiritual kingdom of God. Since Paul thinks of Jerusalem, or the spiritual kingdom, as “our mother” (Gal. 4:26), it is only natural that Christ, our “elder brother,” should be thought of as her son.

“Tell ye the daughter of Zion
Behold, thy king cometh unto thee,
Meek, and riding upon an ass,
And upon a colt the foal of an ass.”
(Matt. 21:5. Cf. Jno. 12:15.)

Does Matthew set forth Jesus as the rightful king of national Israel, or as the actual king of spiritual Israel? It seems quite certain that he is doing the latter. Jesus is king of national Israel; that is, he was appointed of God to be king of the Jews in the same sense in which he was appointed to be king of the Gentiles, also. He was never anointed to be a temporal king; just as he was never ordained to be a priest after the order of Aaron. “Behold, thy king cometh! “That is said to me, a believing Gentile, as well as to those Galileans.

“And I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand, having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads.” (Rev. 14:1.) Here Zion cannot have either the first or second meaning, but certainly signifies the place of the saved as it does in Heb. 12:22.

We have given examples enough from the New Testament. Let us now examine a few from the Old Testament. But before doing so we should consider three things:

First, in all predictive passages of the Bible highly wrought figures of speech, especially, and bold symbols are found. In Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah we see shining examples of this fact. Some passages in Isaiah and Jeremiah exhibit the same style in a less

brilliant degree. Revelation excels them all. It is an ordered delirium of words, of figures and symbols. This kind of language appears also in the brief utterances of Jesus and Paul concerning the last things. (Matt. 24:1-31; 2 Thess. 2:1-12.) We cannot here inquire into the cause of this fact but must be content simply to note it. Such inquiry, it is certain, would yield a rich reward.

Secondly, the writers of predictive prophecy have the right to use words as they see fit. It is not my privilege to prejudge them or to determine their method of expression. Am I, a man not inspired, to judge in advance how inspired men shall write, or to limit the Holy Spirit's use of words? Who am I that I should do this ambitious thing? It is my business to learn and not to dictate in this matter.

Thirdly, the prophets themselves did not understand all the meaning that there was in what they said. This is a vital principle of interpretation. About twenty-five years ago I heard President W. R. Harper, in lecturing on certain of the Minor Prophets, state that no more meaning should be put into the language of Scripture than that which the writer or speaker himself considered it to have. I believe that this is a principle of interpretation that is fundamentally wrong. It is a theory of inspiration that is too limiting. Daniel states specifically in one case that he did not understand what he heard and related. (Dan. 12:8.) Peter suggests that this limitation of knowledge was a common thing with those who wrote Messianic prophecies. (1 Pet. 1:10-12.) Some utterances of the prophets have more meaning in them than the prophets themselves understood to be in them; some, I say, not all.

Remember that we are undertaking to show that the first coming of Jesus is predicted in the Old Testament in highly wrought figures of speech, in bold symbols and realistic language; that many passages do not refer wholly or mainly, or at all, to Israel's condition in Palestine after the Babylonian exile, nor to any

condition in Palestine or on earth after the second coming of Christ; but that they describe his first coming and the “glories that should follow.” (Cf. 1 Peter 1:11.)

There are many passages that invite discussion, and they tempt us to an extended exposition. A volume would be required to give the subject an exhaustive treatment. But space permits us to deal with only a few examples, and that briefly.

“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” (Isa. 61:1, 2.)

Jesus read this passage of Isaiah to the congregation in the synagogue in Nazareth and said that it was then “fulfilled in their ears.” (Cf. Luke 4:18- 21.) But did Jesus open prison doors and turn the convicts out? Nothing like that is to be thought of. The language is realistic, but the thought is spiritual. Some clauses of this Messianic prophecy are to be taken literally, but not this one.

“Yet have I set my king
Upon my holy hill of Zion.
I will tell of the decree: The Lord said unto me, Thou art my son;
This day have I begotten thee.”
(Ps. 2:6, 7.)

This second Psalm has unity. All of its parts are related. The disciples in Jerusalem apply part of it to Jesus, the Jews and the Gentiles of their day. (Acts 4:25-27.) The author of the Hebrews twice quotes the last two lines given above, applying them to Christ as already fulfilled. (Heb. 1:5; 5:5.) That is, when the New Testament was written Christ was king in Zion. That is, Zion here cannot be taken literally.

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house Israel, and with the house Judah: not

according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke, although I was a husband unto them, saith the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people: and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more.” (Jer. 31:31-34.)

Concerning this prophecy these three things are certainly true. First, it is fulfilled in Christ’s first coming. The author of the Hebrews says so. He quotes the whole passage. (Heb. 8:8-12.) Secondly, the “house of Israel” and “the house of Judah” must, therefore, mean spiritual Israel and cannot mean national Israel. Thirdly, the description of the age of the New Covenant, namely, “they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them,” however it is interpreted, must apply to our age and not to some time or age after Christ comes again. There is no escape from this conclusion for those who accept the inspiration of the book of Hebrews. (Cf. Jer. 32:40, 41; 33:14-22; Ezek. 37:26-28; Heb. 2:14.)

“And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. And I will save you from your uncleanness; and I will call for the com,

and will multiply it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field.” (Ezek. 36:25-30. Cf. 11:17-20.) Read on in the chapter to verse 37.

The prophet describes in realistic terms a delectable and supernatural state as Israel’s future destiny in Palestine after their return from exile. But though he uses terms descriptive of national Israel restored to their beloved land, his language cannot be limited to that, nor is it applicable mainly to that. Because much of the language cannot be applied to their state after the return. Their post-exilic history does not fit this description. Besides part of this passage, the main thought of it, is fulfilled in the Christian age. Compare verse 26 of this passage with verse 33 of the passage just quoted from Jeremiah, which the writer of the Hebrews understands is fulfilled in the Christian age. Compare also verse 25 with Hebrews 10:22. This prophecy of Ezekiel is likewise fulfilled in the gospel. We are, therefore, not to look for its literal fulfilment in an age yet to be.

“Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, whither they are gone, and I will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: and I will make them one nation in the land, upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king of them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned, and I will cleanse them; so shall they be my people, and I will be their God. And my servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments and observe my statutes and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant,

wherein your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, they, and their children, and their children's children, forever: and David my servant shall be their prince forever. Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the nations shall know that I am the Lord that sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore." (Ezek. 37:21-28.)

Observe several simple things as to this Messianic prophecy. It is clothed in terms descriptive of the return from exile and of prosperity in the Promised Land and is predictive of these future blessings. But it cannot be limited to them. Nor does it have to do mainly with these national, temporal and earthly conditions. "My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall have one shepherd." "David my servant shall be their prince forever." These statements apply to no pre-Christian age or state. David means Christ; just as Elijah in Malachi 4:5, means John the Baptist. He is the good shepherd and also the "one shepherd." (Cf. Jno. 10:14-16.) And under his kingship and shepherding tribal and kingdom, as well as racial, distinctions disappear. The "covenant of peace" is the "new covenant" or the gospel. The "tabernacle" (or "sanctuary") stands for the spiritual presence of God, spiritual worship, the gospel of salvation for both the Jews and Gentiles, as it does in Amos 9:11. James in Acts 15:16 gives it this meaning. To look for a meaning for this prophecy of Ezekiel other than what took place in the return from exile and in the first coming of Christ and what is taking place in the present Christian age is unfortunate. It blinds the eyes to the present power and glory of the gospel. It makes Christians idle dreamers, feverishly looking for what God has not promised.

We must here discontinue comments on passages of this kind. If the reader desires to investigate others the following are commended, some of which are specified in the New Testament as fulfilled: Isa. 2:2-4; 9:7; 11:1-9; 59:20, 21; 60:14-22; 62:1- 12; 66:10-16; Ezek. 34:11-31; Joel 2:28-32; Amos 9:11; Micah 4:1-8; 5:1-5; Hab. 2:14; Zeph. 3:13-20; Zech. 2:10-13; 8:3; 9:9; 13:1, 6, 7.

It is the belief of the writer that all the passages here discussed and cited refer to Israel's return from captivity and life in their own land and to Christ's first advent and the Christian age, and not at all to his second coming nor any condition on earth after his second coming. In fact, he is not convinced that any Scriptures of the Old Testament predict his second coming. The forecasting of that glorious event was reserved for a later date; it was revealed in the time of the New Testament, after the first coming of Christ, when the foretelling of it was needed and could be appreciated. Why tell of the second coming of Christ, before he had come the first time, to a nation and a world that would not understand the prophecies of his first coming? Divine revelation is not guilty of this blunder.

4. A fourth difficulty is met with in certain passages that seem to be against the views of the kingdom heretofore set forth.

This difficulty, or this class of difficulties, arises from an apparent or superficial, not the real, interpretation of the Scripture. The passages to be considered fall into four groups:(1) Those that speak of the kingdom as having a beginning in history since there were true worshipers in the earth; (2) those that represent it as future to the inspired writers or speakers; (3) those in which the disciples of the New Testament are considered as not in the kingdom; (4) those that describe the kingdom to Israel as a nation.

(1) "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heavens set up a kingdom." (Dan. 2:44.)

It has been said in a former chapter that the kingdom of God

began on earth when the first true worshiper, Abel, brought an “excellent sacrifice” to God. (Cf. Heb. 11:4.) How then could it be “set up” at a later date? But there is no need to understand “set up” to mean an *absolute beginning*. We can think of the stages of progress in the kingdom. Daniel predicts a period of great advancement for it, namely, the time of the New Testament, compared with which former periods were not to be thought of. Consider that the Holy Spirit is spoken of in some passages as if he had not been in the world before the day of Pentecost, which, of course, is not true. (John 7:39; 16:7; Acts 1:8.) But his coming on that day was so signal and his presence in the world from that time on was to be so potent that these passages seem to represent him as then coming into the world for the first time. It is relatively true, but, of course, not absolutely true, that democracy began with the Declaration of Independence by the colonies of America. The world had experienced flashes of it before but then it began in earnest to take the earth. Thus, too, did the kingdom of God begin in the time of the New Testament. So Paul explains to his philosophic hearers at Athens: “The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked (which does not mean that he took no account of men’s sins, but that he did not send forth a universal call for repentance); but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent.” (Acts 17:30.)

“Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” (Matt. 16:18.)

It seems that in this place church means the same as kingdom. But we should not understand “will build” to mean a future *beginning to build*, but rather a *continuing to build*. Jesus is thinking of the foundation of his church, or kingdom, which is never to cease to be, not of the date of its origin. An American statesman might say: “We will build our democracy on the bed-rock of liberty.” He

would not thereby imply that our democracy is not now in existence.

One may consider as other passages of this class Luke 12:32; 19:12; Acts 1:6, 7.

(2) “Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22.)

Paul is here thinking of the kingdom in its future eternal glory, not as beginning in the future. Peter has the same conception exactly: “Thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:11.) Both Paul and Peter consider those to whom they speak and write as saved and in the kingdom. But they are now in that part of the kingdom which is on earth; they are to be in that part of it which is in heaven. In like manner Paul thinks of redemption as future: “In whom ye were sealed unto the day of redemption.” (Eph. 4:30.) But are not the Ephesians already saved or redeemed? To be sure, they are. But they are yet to experience the final consummation of it, the hope of which Paul holds before them.

Other passages of this class are 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1, 18; James 2:5; Matt. 19:28; Luke 17:20; 19:11; 21:31; 22:18.

(3) Some passages already cited belong to the third group also. Four additional ones will suffice.

“Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5:20.) Jesus is speaking to his disciples. If they are already in the kingdom, why does he raise the possibility of their not being permitted to enter into it? There is a simple reason. He wanted to make it plain that such lives as the scribes and Pharisees were living had no place in his kingdom. So, he said again to his disciples: “Except ye turn and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 18:3.) They are in the kingdom, but the ambitious spirit that now possesses them has

no place in the kingdom. This is easily seen to be the meaning when we make allowance for the emphatic language that Jesus would naturally use to meet the demands of the situation that confronted him or to get his ideas “across” to men of such moral lack and spiritual obtuseness as he had to deal with.

Matthew 11:11, 12 seems to consider John the Baptist as not in the kingdom, but there is another and a better interpretation of these verses. Jesus is warning the disciples against ambition. “He that is but little in the kingdom is greater than he” should not suggest that John is not in the kingdom but should be understood as we understand: “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 18:4.) Jesus used paradoxical statements of this kind often. (Cf. Matt. 16:25; 19:30; 23:11; Luke 9:48.)

It is clear to any one that considers the context that Matthew 6:33 does not command the disciples to “seek” to *enter into* the kingdom but to *advance* it.

(4) As examples of the fourth group I cite two peculiar passages.

“The sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into outer darkness.” (Matt. 8:12.) The meaning is that the Jews as a nation are to be rejected. They are “sons of the kingdom” in the sense of being God’s chosen or special people. The context shows that Jesus is predicting the acceptance of the gospel by the Gentiles and its rejection by the Jews and their consequent rejection by God. “The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” (Matt. 21:43.) This passage has the same meaning exactly as the one just explained. “A nation” signifies in general the Gentiles. The Jews had or possessed the kingdom in the same sense in which they were the “sons of the kingdom,” that is, God’s chosen people.

I may say frankly that the interpretations of difficult passages

here offered are intended for those who have spiritual insight, who do not think mechanically, who are not slaves of words, who appreciate the “invisible things” of God, who can distinguish between the building and the scaffolding, between a picture and the frame, between the kernel and the shell, between the grain and the chaff, between the corn and the husk.

5. *A fifth and final difficulty is the presence of evil in the world.*

How can Christ be reigning when sin is powerful and persistent in men and in society? This fact staggers many. They take refuge in the view that Christ is not now on the throne and will not be until every vestige of sin is eliminated from human life and society. So, an honored brother says: “Christ is not a king actually yet, though he is a king in expectation of the throne. At the present time, he is a king in exile, and he is just as truly in exile from the earth as Napoleon was in exile, and as the king of Belgium was an exile from his own kingdom during the Great War.”

Now, all informed students of the Bible know that the fact of sin is a great mystery. Why did God permit it to enter and mar his beautiful world? Why does he permit it to remain here? Why does it exist at all in his universe? Does the presence of sin in God’s creation argue the weakness of God or push him off his throne? Does it keep him from being supreme over his universe or deprive him for one moment of his actual kingship? We dare not so reason. And we should not so reason as to Christ. He is not in exile. Who had power to send him into exile? He said he laid down his life of his own choice and was not forced to do it. (Cf. John 10:18.) He ascended from the Mount of Olives because he chose to do so, not because he was banished from the earth. And now for a time he is absent from us, not because he is weak, not because he is held as a prisoner somewhere else, not because there is any power on earth or in hell that prevents him from being here, but because in his wisdom

he willed not to be here.

As to this problem of evil in the world and its relation to the reign of Christ two simple observations will be found to be elucidating:(1) Christ is stronger than sin; (2) but his method of exercising his power is not the elimination of Satan from the world nor the eradication of evil all at once.

Christ is stronger than sin. This is the same as saying Christ is stronger than Satan. The Bible considers the Devil to be the source and ruler of all evil beings and forces. But it represents Christ as overcoming the Devil and destroying his kingdom. His very mission to the world had this as its objective. “To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” (1 John 3:8.)

There are three Scriptures that show undoubtedly that Jesus when on earth was destroying the power of Satan. “I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven.” (Luke 10:19.) This does not refer to the origin of Satan, but to the disrupting of his power as a result of the ministry of the “seventy,” as the context shows. They had cast out demons, Satan’s subjects, by the name of Christ. “When the strong man fully armed guardeth his own court, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him his whole armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.” (Luke 11:21, 22. Cf. Mark 3:27; Matt. 12:29.) Jesus describes Satan as a strong man but counts himself stronger and claims that he is despoiling him of his goods. He represents himself as *binding* Satan. This is very striking and significant and should be earnestly considered. “Now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” (John 12:31.) Jesus is revealing the power of his death on the cross. It is the deed preeminent by which Satan is “cast out.” “Prince of this world” occurs three times in John and always means Satan. (Cf. John 14:30; 16:11.)

Now we find Jesus saying that he “binds” Satan and again that he “casts out” Satan. What does he mean? That Satan is absolutely and wholly eliminated from the world? No, for Jesus says again: “The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me.” (John 14:30.)

Christ does not annihilate Satan but binds him. He binds him by revealing him. “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” (John 12:31.) In the death of Christ there is revealed the character of the world and the character of the evil one. The Holy Spirit will convict the world “of judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged.” (John 16:11.) Christ does not kill the Devil, but he despoils him of his goods. His goods are human souls whom Christ wins to himself. While the prince of the world looks on, he takes them from him. He cleanses them and makes them pure. He did this when he was on earth. He has been doing it more and more since he went away and since the coming of the Paraclete. He said he went away for this purpose. We ought to believe what he said. We ought to read the eighteen centuries of history and the present signs of the times to see how he has been doing it. Death is one of the works of the devil. How does Christ destroy death? By causing it not to be, as the poor Christian Scientists try to believe? No, but by giving us the victory over it. “In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33.)

One once reasoned thus: If God did not want sin to be and could not prevent it, he is weak; if he could have prevented it and did not, he is imperfect. But all such reasoning is vain. In like manner those who contend that while evil is in the world Christ is not on his throne are fighting against the divine order of things. They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. They simply refuse to accept Christ’s plan for this world which is already revealed in the Bible, in providence and in history.

Christ reigns in the world as the sun reigns in the heavens. There is also night. But who can say how dark and cold and how long the night would have been had not the “Sun of Righteousness arisen with healing in his wings”? Not here, but over there, where there is no night, shall all the “shadows flee away.”

CHAPTER 7 – THE RETURN OF THE KING

Christ is coming! Let creation
Bid her groans and travail cease;
Let the glorious proclamation
Hope restore and faith increase.
Long thine exiles have been pining,
Far from rest and home and thee;
But in heavenly vestures shining,
Soon they shall thy glory see.
With that “blessed hope” before us,
Let no harp remain unstrung;
Let the mighty advent chorus
Onward roll from tongue to tongue.

Christianity has a history. It is subject to the law of development. It came down from the sky, but it did not *drop down all at once*. It is a revelation, but a revelation that has had vital connection with human experience. It has had a place in and a relation to the onward march of the world’s events. It is like a river. It is, as the poet has said, the “river of salvation.” With its source in the mountains of God’s love and wisdom it has moved on through the ages, increasing in mass and momentum by means of many tributaries, whose waters fall from the clouds of divine providence and power. Christianity is the potency, wisdom and love of God manifest in human affairs. “History is philosophy teaching by example,” and much more. It is God speaking to mankind through the fixed laws of nature and also by special providences of grace, in which is revealed his fixed purpose to bless and save the world.

Christianity lays hold of the present as well as the past. It has a message for the present age. It is not antiquated. It is not buried in

the past. It lives. It has vital breath. In truth, Christianity is the only thing in the world to-day that has power. Everything else in which civilization trusted has proved to be weak.

But Christianity has a future also. It has a forward look. It always did lay hold of the future. It is a religion of prophets and seers, of visions and dreams, of hopes and expectations, of prophecies and fulfillments. It is the only system in the history of the world, religious or secular, that has been able to forecast the future. The eyes of all others, than the prophets of God, are veiled when they try to see the things that are to be.

In the long centuries of the pre-Christian age there were “fore-gleams” of a better day. All devout souls, in their ordeals of trouble, consoled themselves with this blessed hope. From Moses on the men of God spoke of the “Coming One.” The Messianic hope was a golden thread running through all Hebrew history. In the fulness of time he came, and in a few years, he finished his mission and returned to his heavenly glory. But he left us with the definite and well-founded hope that he will return.

The doctrine of the Second Advent of Christ is fundamental in Christianity. Those who reject it, belittle it, or explain it away, are infidels. They deny the faith. If Christ is not to come a second time, half of the value, or more, of his first coming is taken away, and the world is moving on in darkness, as a ship that has lost its course in a storm and is without compass or captain or even the sight of a star. And if we know not whither we are going, the lessons of history are uncertain. If the light, that we think is light, be darkness, how great is the darkness. We need to come back to, or to stand firmly by, the “faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints.” The first Christians believed in a personal, visible and glorious return of Christ to this earth. The thought of it thrilled their souls. They lived in the glowing inspiration of it.

Jesus came the first time. It was a real coming. He fulfilled literally many prophecies, prophecies that were to be understood literally. He will fulfill again literally the prophecies of his second coming, such as are to be understood literally.

Let us renew our thought on these simple propositions: Jesus came into the world; he was in the world in person and in the flesh for thirty-three years, as he had not been in it before; then he went away; he has not been in the world for more than eighteen hundred years as he was in it for thirty- three years; he is not here as he was here; he will come again in like manner as he went away, that is, personally and visibly and gloriously, as the disciples saw him ascend from the Mount of Olives.

When, therefore, a professor of note answers the question, “Will Christ come again?” by asking, “When did he ever go away?” we are shocked with his light and worldly manner of dealing with a vital matter of faith. The assumption that there are only two ways of interpreting the Bible on the subject of the return of Christ, namely, the premillennial method, on the one hand, and a so-called scientific method on the other, which, in fact, denies his second coming, is gratuitous. It is a subtle hiding of the issue that does not belong to straightforward scholarship. Does he not know that the great majority of orthodox Christians are postmillennialists, that they believe in the personal and visible return of Christ, as truly as do the premillennialists, and that they also apply the scientific and historical method to the interpretation of the Bible? Serious suspicions are aroused against what is called “sacred literature” when we find infidelity clothed in the showy garments of the scientific method and adorned with the bright colors of historical criticism. If I had to choose between his theory and the one, he argues against, I would not know which to take. I thank God I am privileged to reject both. We do not have to choose between

scientific infidelity, which believes little or nothing, and unscientific faith, which believes so many things that are not true. Scientific faith is possible. It always has been. It is the only true faith. I am not willing to let unbelief steal the noble words, science and history, or to mar their meaning.

Jesus himself foretold his return and did it in a way that was, as we shall see when we look into the matter, most natural. It does not have artificial but vital connection with his teaching and mission. It is not something outward and foreign that is introduced into his plan of redemption, but something inward and essential that becomes manifest as it develops.

As is natural, therefore, Jesus did not speak of his second coming until toward the close of his ministry. Why should he teach men of his second coming before they have time to realize something of the meaning of his first coming? After it became necessary for Jesus to tell his disciples of his death and departure from the world, which was about six months from the close of his ministry, after that and not before, as was natural, he began also to tell them of his return. (Cf. Matt. 16:21.) As was also natural, the nearer to the end he came the more he said about it.

Barring Luke 12:35-48, where Jesus is speaking, it seems, of the finishing of his earthly mission, his first definite statement as to his return I find to be in Luke 17:24-37, where he says his coming will be like the lightning that lightens up the whole sky, like the flood in Noah's day and like the raining of fire and brimstone upon Sodom. His next clear teaching on the subject, uttered soon after, is the parable of the pounds. (Luke 19:11-27.) Then comes the Passion Week in which he spoke much about it. In the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of Matthew he answers at length the three questions of his disciples: when Jerusalem would be destroyed, when he would come again, and when the age would end. (Cf. Mark

13:1-37; Luke 21:5-36.) Most of what he says is in answer to the second question. But Jesus seems to speak as knowing that his coming and the end of the age would happen at the same time. He repeats in Matthew some thoughts that are recorded in Luke as uttered previously. He recounts the signs of his coming, or the events that shall precede his coming, and describes the situation of the world when he comes and the catastrophic events that will be coincident with his coming. He enforces his command to “watch” by the illustration of a thief coming at the time when he is not expected, an illustration that made a deep impression on the apostles (Cf. 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15; 1 Thess. 5:4, 5), and by the parables of the Ten Virgins and of the Talents. In concluding he describes the judgment of the nations when he returns “sitting on the throne of his glory.” They shall be gathered before him and be separated into two classes, as “the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats,” the one to be blessed, the other to be cursed.

He seems to refer to his second coming in a covert saying at the institution of the Lord’s Supper. (Luke 22:18.) And Paul says that in its observance we “proclaim the Lord’s death till he come.” (1 Cor. 11:26.) I think we may justly conclude, therefore, that as the Passover was both commemorative of the deliverance from Egypt and prophetic of the coming of the Lamb of God who should take away the sin of the world, so Jesus, supplanting the old covenant with the new made the supper a memorial of his death and also a prophecy of his return.

After his resurrection and after his appearances during a period of forty days, in which he spoke to the disciples of “the things concerning the kingdom of God,” and once at least of the specific subject of his return (John 21:22), he “was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.” (Acts 1:9.) And then, “while they were looking steadfastly into heaven as he went, behold two men

stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? this Jesus, which was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven.” (Acts 1:10, 11.)

What now was the effect upon the apostles of the many statements of Jesus and of the one of the “two men”? Did these statements “sink in”? Did the disciples believe them? Did they give to the doctrine the important place in their thought, preaching and general outlook upon the future that it deserved? We shall see that they did. Paul, too, had the same viewpoint. The idea of the return of Christ was fundamental in his Christology and eschatology. It was, so to speak, in his system and was ever expressing itself. In their writings it is not introduced in a forced or artificial way, but it is there naturally; it is a vital part of the body of their faith. Take it out and it will bleed to death.

We find the method of the apostles was the same as that of Jesus. They preached the first coming of Christ first and then, when that was accepted, his second coming. They made it prominent in their message to believers but gave it a small place in their message to the unsaved.

Peter on the day of Pentecost said nothing about Christ’s second coming. He wanted to convince his unbelieving hearers that the Messiah had come the first time. But soon after that, when addressing a multitude of believers and unbelievers in the temple, he made a passing reference to it. (Acts 3:21.) He knew his business too well to dwell at length upon the subject before that mixed audience.

But in his epistles, where he writes to believers only, he dwells upon it as an inspiring hope (1 Pet. 1:7, 13); as a doctrine that mockers reject (2 Pet. 3:4); as a “day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (3:7); as a day of the cleansing by fire and renewal of

the universe, that will “come as a thief; in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (3:10-12); and as a day whose coming we should be “looking for and earnestly desiring.” (3:12.)

John writes as one who knows that the expectation of the return of Christ was in the mind of all believers. His one reference in his gospel to the final coming of Christ shows this. (John 21:22, 23.) Statements elsewhere of a coming of Christ refer to other kinds of coming, to his coming in the ordeal of death, on the day of Pentecost, and in the fellowship of love. (Cf. 14:3, 18, 23.) The one reference in his epistles to the final coming of Christ also shows that he knew the subject needed neither explanation nor defense. (1 John 2:28.) It is accepted as a matter of course by him and by those to whom he writes.

In the Revelation God himself, the Lord God Almighty, is described three times as the one “who is, and who was, and who is to come.” (Rev. 1:4, 8; 4:8.) We are not to apply this language to Christ, as is often done. It refers clearly and especially to the First Person of the Trinity, as the context shows; this, however, does not require that the thought of the Second Person is to be excluded. The basis for this description of God is the name God gave to himself when he appeared to Moses at the burning bush, “I am that I am,” which also was the basis for Israel’s national name for God, Jehovah or Yahveh, the essential idea of which is self-existence. But it is significant that in the description before us the past and present tenses of the verb *to be* are used, but not the future tense of it. God is not described as *the one that is to be*, but *the one that is to come* or *the one that comes*. The suggestion is obvious. God is an ever-coming God. He is ever revealing himself in history. He is ever approaching us in the events of the world. They are his providences.

This is a very valuable addition to our conception of God. The names, titles and descriptions of the Persons of the Trinity should be carefully scrutinized. Subjecting them to reverent study will always yield results. The revelation in Christ reacts upon our knowledge of the divine character to increase it. We find here one key to the interpretation of the book of Revelation; without which not all its mysteries and treasures can be unlocked.

Accordingly, Christ, through whom God mediates all things, often declares himself to be coming. He comes for judgment and discipline (2:5, 16; 3:3; 16:15), for deliverance (2:25; 3:11), for fellowship. (3:20.) He is an ever-coming, ever-approaching, ever-arriving one. But these special preliminary comings of Christ are real and are made possible only by virtue of his one great consummate coming, to which they are necessarily and vitally related. They would have no meaning if this were not to be. Here we have another key to the interpretation of Revelation. In the salutation in the first chapter the final coming of Christ is affirmed thus: "Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him." (1:7.) The language resembles that of Matthew 24:30. At the close of the prophecy Christ gives as his last word to men the precious promise: "Behold I come quickly." (22:20.) This certainly refers to his final coming, and so also, quite certainly, do the other two affirmations in the same words of this last chapter. (22:7, 12.) It may be that 16:15 belongs also to this class of passages, rather than in the list above where it is placed.

We may say then that the coming of Christ, both subsidiary and final, is a note that rings clear and triumphant throughout the book of Revelation. *It is built on this tone; it is pitched to this key.*

Jude, like Peter, regards the return of Christ as a "mercy" to be looked for. (Verse 21.) James counts it a hope of reward, like a

farmer's expectation of a crop, that should create patience. (5:7.) The author of Hebrews states clearly that Christ "shall appear a second time apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation" (9:28); he exhorts his readers to "love and good works," in as much as they "see the day drawing nigh" (10:25); and, like James, on the basis of this promised "recompense of reward" he urges patience. (10:36, 37.)

We come now to consider the prominence Paul gives to the second coming of Christ. This interests us greatly, as does his teaching concerning the Holy Spirit and on many other subjects, since he was not one of the first apostles and got his knowledge of the gospel without human aid. (Cf. Gal. 1:11, 12.) Paul affirms once and suggests once that he spoke by special revelation on this subject. (1 Thess. 4:15; 1 Cor. 15:51.) It is impossible, therefore, for a devout believer not to have the greatest respect for what Paul says. I confess that I often have a feeling of mingled amusement and chagrin when I hear budding theologians, some of whom have sufficient years to their credit, and certain ambitious women also, speak slightingly of the apostle Paul. They seem to me to be not only dull but profane critics. Since they do not take pains even to learn what Paul says, much less to understand him, but show a curious delight in pointing out what they elect to count his mistakes, I cannot but liken them to a famous infidel who was fond of holding forth on the "mistakes of Moses." It ought not to take us very long to choose between Moses and Bob Ingersoll and between Paul and his half-baked critics. What is the matter with Paul? Well, unfortunately (?) he got in the way of high-minded and headstrong men and women and they don't like it. I am glad he did. His demerit is his merit.

As said before, the doctrine of the second coming of Christ is vital in Paul's Christology and eschatology. Christ is the one for

whom all things exist. (Col. 1:16.) He will be revealed as such at some future time. He will then be honored by all intelligences in the universe. His redeemed people, too, will then “come into their own.” They will share his glory. Unbelievers will be judged and sent to their punishment. When he comes the world will be delivered from its bondage of corruption and pain and will be renewed. It will be the end of this age and the consummation of all things. It is that divine event, far off or close at hand, to which the whole creation moves. We find the doctrine, in one aspect or another, running through all Paul’s teaching, in his speeches and his writings.

In his address at Athens he refers to the day that God has appointed in which he will judge the world by Christ. (Acts 17:31.) In the second epistle to the Thessalonians he reminds them that he had, when he was with them, explained to them certain things concerning the time of the return. (2 Thess. 2:5.) In his first epistle he says that they “know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night” and that he does not need to write anything to them on that point. (1 Thess. 5:1, 2.) So, it was Paul’s custom to teach his churches as to the second coming of Christ. He even referred to it when addressing for the first time an audience that was mostly, if not altogether, as yet unbelievers.

In the two short epistles to the Thessalonians, his first writings, he speaks often on the subject. In the first he exhorts them to live in expectation of Christ’s return; he explains that those who have died already will not be deprived of their share in the great event, a matter that disturbed them, but that they will return with him, affirming that he has the Lord’s authority for so speaking (4:15); that those who are living when he comes will be changed into the same state or condition in which they and Christ are; he reminds them that the “day of the Lord” will come as a “thief in the night” and that it will be “sudden destruction” to “the sons of the night”

who “sleep”; he tells them to “comfort one another with these words”; and finally he wishes a blessing upon them at the “coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thess. 1:10; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-7, 23.)

In the second epistle Paul goes into the subject more fully, repeating somewhat of the things said in the first epistle and adding much that is new. Christ will be revealed “from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire”; he will render “vengeance to them that know not God” and “obey not the gospel” and will banish them from his presence; at his coming he will be glorified in and wondered at by all believers. (2 Thess. 1:7-10.) Since the Thessalonians have become excited over the time of the return, believing that it is imminent or “right at hand” and are as a result in an abnormal condition of mind, abstaining from useful work and becoming busy-bodies and disorderly, he goes at length into this phase of the question.

He says positively that “the day of the Lord is not just at hand” and proceeds to tell them that a certain event must come first, namely, “a falling away” and the coming of the “man of sin,” which, it seems, are two aspects of the same event. This “man of sin” is further described as the “son of perdition,” as one that “exalts himself against all that is called God or that is worshiped,” as one, however, that assumes the place of God, that “sitteth in the temple of God” and “setteth himself forth as God,” as the “lawless one,” who when he is fully revealed will do the work of “Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that perish.” At present this one is restrained by some power or agent of which the Thessalonians have knowledge, but which is to be “taken out of the way.” When this happens he will be fully revealed and will have his own way as the “lawless one,” doing the work of “Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them

that perish.” This “man of sin” or “lawless one” or one who “setteth himself forth as God” will continue until Christ comes and will then be destroyed by him. Though he is under a handicap his Satanic and subtle energy is, nevertheless, known to Paul. This is certainly the meaning of the statement, “the mystery of lawlessness doth already work.” (2 Thess. 2:1-12.)

I venture this interpretation. Paul is thinking of an evil principle or energy that has personal embodiment or representation. So, he describes it as the “man of sin,” the “son of perdition,” etc. It is already at work and is to continue until Christ comes, when it will be destroyed. Paul thinks also of the restraining influence or power as both impersonal and personal. (Cf. verses 6 and 7.) It, too, is a power or principle that has personal embodiment or representation. The evil principle is that spirit of anti-christ that has manifested itself preeminently in the Catholic Church. Here is a power that claims to be God’s power but ever exalts itself against him. This evil spirit, in the form of Judaism, was at work when Paul wrote. Catholicism is in part Judaism transplanted in Roman paganism. A suggestive fact is that Catholicism gives Peter the primacy over Paul as did the Judaic prejudices in the first churches. Not until the Reformation was Paul given his proper place in Christendom and that only among Protestants. It is impossible for him to have it in Catholicism which is slightly Christian, but mainly Judaic and pagan. Notice that Paul connects the “falling away” with the revealing of the “man of sin” and that Jesus also foretold the defection of many. (Matt. 24:10-12.) The power that “restraineth now” was the Roman government, which was, when Paul wrote, a check upon the diabolical spirit and power of Judaism which also claimed to represent God but was wholly against him. Paul saw that the restraint that the Roman government was exercising would cease, “be taken out of the way,” and then “hell would break loose.”

Dr. David Smith has in the main the same view (Cf. *Life and Letters of St. Paul*, p. 173f).

But whether this interpretation is correct or not, we see that Paul speaks as a prophet. He knows what he is talking about. He is imparting a revelation. God gave him eyes with which to see the future at least in dim outline. He knew that he saw what he saw. He said that the day of Christ was not then just at hand. He rebuked the Thessalonians for letting the expectation of Christ's return excite their minds and turn them aside from the performance of their normal duties. It is very strange that some writers, who attempt to explain Paul's attitude to Christ's second coming, do not pay attention to what Paul says in his earliest writings. But this is the only starting point for those who really want to understand Paul on this vital subject.

Much of what Paul says in his first epistle to the Corinthians is vitally related to the final coming of Christ. He commends them thus: "Ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye be unproveable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 1:7, 8.) He tells them to suspend their own judgments "until the Lord come," who will then bring all things to light and will give to every man his due. (1 Cor. 4:5.) It should be said here that the reference to "the distress that is upon us" (1 Cor. 7:26) is not a reference to the second coming. It is impossible that Paul should speak of the "blessed hope" (Tit. 2:13) as an "impending distress." Nor would he have allowed the expectation of the return to disrupt the social order, which, as we have seen, he did not allow in the case of the Thessalonians. "The distress that is upon us" must be understood as applying to something else. In fact, it is only one who is bent on finding mistakes in Paul, and is hard pressed for an argument, that would think of affirming that it refers to the second coming.

In explaining that the Lord's Supper is a memorial of Christ's death Paul points out that it is to be repeated "till he come." (1 Cor. 11:26.) That is, the Lord's Supper in addition to being a memorial, is also a prophecy. As those devout Jews who ate the Passover could look both backward to deliverance from Egypt and forward to the Lamb of God that would deliver his people from sin, so we in this ordinance the seal of the new covenant, much more frequently observed, look backward to our own deliverance from sin and also forward to that great event when the whole creation shall be "delivered from the bondage of corruption." (Rom. 8:21.)

In the extended discussion of the resurrection in the fifteenth chapter the return of Christ, though not dwelt upon, is a fundamental idea. The resurrection life is for those who are alive when Christ comes, as well as for those who die before he comes. Accordingly, the change of the bodies of living believers into resurrection bodies will take place when he comes, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." (1 Cor. 15:20-23, 51, 52.) The change that is wrought "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" refers, I think, to the same experience that is described in 1 Thess. 4:17 by the words, "caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." In both places, it seems, Paul is speaking from special revelation. In Thessalonians his language is: "We say unto you by the word of the Lord"; in Corinthians it is, "Behold, I tell you a mystery." In the salutation, which Paul calls attention to as being in his own handwriting, he affirms in a peculiar and forceful expression the coming of Christ. (1 Cor. 16:22.)

In Second Corinthians we have an explanation of how death may be thought of as a coming of Christ. It is an experience in which we enter into the presence of Christ, become "at home with the Lord." (2 Cor. 5:1-8.) Christ's coming to us and our going to him are identical conceptions when it is considered that in this journey space

is no item.

While the return of Christ is not mentioned in Rom. 8:18-23, the thought of it certainly underlies this remarkable prophetic utterance. As in 1 Cor. 15:23, 51-57, so here Paul is speaking of that glorious future event in which all history is to find its consummation and meaning, and which has essential connection with the final coming of Christ.

To the Philippians Paul expresses his confidence that “he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6), which must signify either the day of their death or the day of Christ’s return. Paul does not say which and he quite certainly does not know, but he is living in expectation of the return, as he and all believers are commanded to do, and as he affirms that he and the Philippians are doing. (Phil. 3:20. Cf. Mark 13:37.) He says to them also that “the Lord is at hand” (Phil. 4:5); in which case he must mean spiritual presence. He wants the Philippians to realize Christ in their hearts.

Paul charges Timothy to “keep the commandment, without spot, without reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Tim. 6:14.) In this case, Paul is thinking of the final coming of Christ only. The language quoted and context plainly show it. He wants Timothy to live and labor believing that Christ might come the second time while he was alive. Paul did not know that he would not. The only mind for Christians to have as to the return of Christ is one of expectation. Christ commanded it. Paul has it. He wants Timothy to have it.

He speaks with a like purpose to Titus. “The grace of God hath appeared to all men, bringing salvation, instructing us to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our

Savior Jesus Christ.” (Tit. 2:11-13.) Paul includes himself in the number of those who are instructed to live in expectation of Christ’s return.

Twice in his second letter to Timothy Paul refers to “that day,” once in relation to himself, and once in relation to Onesiphorus. (2 Tim. 1:12, 18.) As in Phil. 1:6 it must here signify either the day of death or the day of Christ’s return. *When he believes that the end of his life on earth is near Paul has the same expectant attitude toward the final coming of Christ that he has had.* It may come before Onesiphorus dies and even before he himself dies, though “the time of his departure is come.” (2 Tim. 4:6.) The return of Christ is so prominent and vivid in his thinking that he delivers a charge to Timothy in view of it. “I charge thee in the sight of God, and of Christ Jesus, who shall judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word.” (2 Tim. 4:1, 2.) The conviction of the final coming of Christ is a stimulus to preaching the gospel, as the very nature of the kingdom is, as the very character of Christ is, and as the very presence of God is. *He swears by it, as he does by these.*

In the above bird’s-eye view of the New Testament teaching as to the second coming of Christ there is also considerable exposition. What follows, therefore, is much briefer than it could otherwise be. The rest of the discussion we develop under four heads: the meaning, the manner and the time of his coming and the mental attitude, that Christians should have, toward his coming.

As to the first topic we have already pointed out several kinds of coming that are ascribed to Christ, his coming to the Christian at death, his coming in fellowship, his coming on the day of Pentecost, his coming in judgment, and his final coming. We may add his coming in moral and spiritual revivals. Here are six kinds of coming the understanding of which will be of great profit.

That Christ comes to his own at death and in spiritual fellowship is so obvious that I need not say anything further on the subject.

That he came to his disciples on the day of Pentecost is accepted by all informed believers, so far as I know. Jesus said, referring to that day, that he would not leave them as “orphans” but would come to them. (John 14:18.) As the Father comes to all those to whom the Son comes, so the Son also comes to all those to whom the Holy Spirit comes. But I dare say that few Christians appreciate the meaning of the day of Pentecost and its significance in the kingdom. “The great and notable day of the Lord,” in the quotation that Peter makes from Joel, is the day of Pentecost, and not the day of the final coming of Christ, as some have imagined. Peter is talking to the point and they, who thus interpret him, are rambling.

We have seen that Christ comes to his people for judgment and discipline. We may enlarge this conception and say that he comes to the world also for judgment. The destruction of Jerusalem has been cited as a case. The World War and other wars may be regarded as examples; in fact, all famines, pestilences, earthquakes and revolutions may be so taken. It is his method to overturn and overturn, to uproot and to burn up all things that hinder and hold back his kingdom, all lies, all prejudices, all customs, all traditions, all conventionalities, all unjust governments, all ignorance, all false knowledge, all pride, all inequalities, all cruelties, all enmities, all shams, hollowness and willfulness of individuals, of organizations, social, ecclesiastical or business, and of nations and civilizations. In a limited sense he is now making all things new. It is but the counterpart of what has just been said to add that great revivals are also the result of Christ’s spiritual coming, whether we think of a local or a national or a world awakening. It would be difficult to think of the Reformation, or of the great revivals of Wesley, Whitefield and Moody, or of the modern missionary movement

from Carey and Judson down to the present day as other than the coming of Christ into the hearts of men. It would be absurd to attempt to explain in any other way these mighty demonstrations of divine power and grace. “My Father worketh even until now and I work,” said Jesus. (John 5:17.)

But these five ways of his coming are not all. There is another, his final, personal coming. The frequent Greek word for the final coming of Christ, *Parousia*, means literally *presence*, the implied thought of which is that he will be personally present as he is now personally absent. (Cf. 1 Thess. 4:15; 2 Thess. 2:1, 8; Jas. 5:7; 2 Pet. 3:4.) He will come as he went away. (Acts 1:11.) It was a personal, visible departure. *It will be a personal, visible, bodily return.* I notice, however, that even premillennialists, such as are well informed, though they habitually think and speak of the millennium in terms of this material world, do not affirm that Christ will come back in a *material* body. (Cf. *Doctrinal Statement by Christian Fundamentals Association*, Denver, 1921.) But his people will see him, and his enemies also will see him. His glory will girdle the earth. (Matt. 24:27.) It is the one consummate coming, as related to which all others are but subsidiary, and without which they would have little or no value.

What will be the manner of his coming? I have just stated it in part. He will come in the air or down from the clouds. His angels will accompany him and so will the saints also. (Matt. 24:30, 31; 1 Thess. 3:13; 4:14.) He will not come as the sin-bearer, as he did the first time, “a man of sorrows,” but as the judge of the world. (Heb. 9:28; Matt. 24:30; 25:31-46; Luke 21:27.) It will be sudden. (Matt. 24:44; Luke 21:35.) It will be attended by catastrophic physical phenomena, convulsions of nature, astronomical chaos and the burning up of the world, after which there will emerge new heavens and a new earth. By water the world was cleansed the first time; it

will be purified the second time by fire. (Matt. 24:29; Luke 21:25, 26; 2 Thess. 1:7; 2 Pet. 3:7, 10-13.) The birth, the death and the resurrection of Christ were accompanied by unusual physical phenomena, as were also certain marked events in his life. Nature itself, though men may not be, is sympathetic and responsive toward its Maker. And it shall be transformed and adjusted to the requirements of a redeemed and perfect humanity, as it is now suited to a fallen and sinful humanity. (Rom. 8:20-23.)

When will the final coming of Jesus be?

Let us try to think with the greatest care and honesty on this subject. There seems to be a strange willfulness as well as superficiality in some who speak and write about it.

Two things we must always keep in mind. Jesus taught that no man knew the time; that angels did not know it; that he himself did not know it; that his coming would be as a thief in the night. As the power of Jesus was, in his incarnation, limited, so also was his knowledge limited. (Cf. Matt. 24:36, 43-45; 25:13.) I have pointed out that Jesus' illustration of the thief coming unexpectedly made a deep impression on the disciples; that Paul also knew of it. The second thing we should keep in mind is that Jesus recounted events that should precede his coming and described conditions that would exist when he shall come. He gave *signs* of his coming. (Cf. Matt. 24:3-14, 23-42.) Jesus' prophecy with respect to this event was therefore a veiled prophecy, as all true forecasting of the future must necessarily be. We cannot know the future as clearly as we know the present, and it is better that we do not so know it. The predictions also of Peter, Paul and John with regard to the final coming of Christ are veiled predictions. They saw as in a mirror obscurely.

Any student of the Bible, therefore, premillennialist or postmillennialist, who so interprets the millennium and its coming as on the one hand, to excite us into an abnormal state of mind, into

the conviction that Christ certainly will come in a few days or in a few years or in our life time, or, on the other hand, to cause us to be indifferent to his coming and to settle down into the conviction that he will not come in our age, is on the wrong track. No one can say it will happen in the next twenty-five years; no one can say it will not. No one should rob us of the expectant attitude toward this blessed event. So far all those who have taken it upon themselves to inform us that Christ would come at a certain date, or within a few years, as some have ever been doing and as many did after the beginning of the World War, have proved to be vain talkers; some of whom, I am glad to note, have good enough judgment now, if not a good enough conscience, to keep silent on the subject.

The book of future events is a sacred book, which only the “Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open.” (Rev. 5:5.) No man is worthy to open it. But in the revelation of the future, that Christ gave to John on Patmos, the point of time of his return is concealed as it was in his address to the disciples on the Mount of Olives. Dr. A. J. Gordon suggests that though Christ, when in the flesh, did not know the time of his return, he may after his ascension, have known it and revealed it. (*Ministry of the Spirit*, p. 55.) But the revelation, “which God gave him to show unto his servants,” was a veiled revelation, as we have said. The time of the return is again kept secret. Dr. Gordon speaks of the “mystical dates” which he thinks some may ferret out or may already have ferreted out. But it did not occur to him that if Jesus had wanted us to know the dates, he would have given exact figures and not symbols. He told his disciples the dates of several future events quite exactly, as for example, his death, his resurrection, his being on a certain mountain in Galilee to meet with them. It is evident that Jesus in the Revelation has the same purpose that he had when he told the disciples that he would come as a thief. He has succeeded in

doing just what he purposed to do, namely, to “keep them guessing.” If one thinks he knows in this matter, where he can only guess, the chances are, one to a million or more, that he will miss it and miss it badly. If one knows he can do nothing but guess, this mental attitude toward a situation makes him the wiser.

It is argued that certain of the signs that Jesus and the apostles gave require the view that the return is imminent, that it must be in a few years at most. For example, Jesus said: “Ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars.” Yes, and then he added, “but the end is not yet.” (Matt. 24:6.) How many wars and rumors of wars must we hear of? He did not say. He said: “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come.” (Matt. 24:14.) But to what extent and degree preached? Did he mean that the gospel is simply to be announced to every nation? Did he mean they are to be evangelized only? Or did he mean that they are to be Christianized, or that a large number of Christians must be made in them before the return? He did not say. What are we to understand by nations? Every tribe and tongue or simply the great divisions of mankind, China, for example, being one nation? Jesus did not say. Then it is better for us not to say.

He said: “And as were the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in a marriage,” etc. (Matt. 24:37-39.) But all that has been going on for eighteen centuries and more. Jesus did not say how many more centuries it is to continue.

Paul writes to Timothy: “But the Spirit saith expressly that in latter times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot

iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by them that believe and know the truth.” (1 Tim. 4:1-3.) Now how can this be a sign that Christ is going to come in a few years? The sins that Paul specifies have been committed from the first century. Paul tells Timothy to put his people, at that time, on guard against them. (1 Tim. 4:6.) “Later times” cannot, therefore, mean the last part of the last age of the world. It is now nearly four centuries since the Council of Trent pronounced a curse on me and all like me who say that marriage is better than celibacy. But Paul saw the tendency arising in his day to condemn marriage and other good things. The old version reads “latter times.” To think that this expression designates our times and to argue that, since the sins that Paul names are committed now, we are certainly near the end, is such consummate folly that I would not even mention it, were it not for the fact that many respectable and pious people are guilty of it.

Again, Paul writes to Timothy: “But know this, that in the last days grievous times shall come.” (2 Tim. 3:1.) Then Paul goes on to describe bad men, such as we have now. “Therefore,” argue the same respectable and pious brethren, “we are in the last part of the last age of the world.” But there is nothing like that in the passage. It was common for the first believers to speak of the Christian age as the last days or last times. The prophets of the Old Testament had visions of the last age of the world. The prophets of the New Testament understood that they had entered into that age. (Cf. Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; 2 Pet. 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:20; Jude 18; 1 John 2:18.) Paul gives a list of sins that men will exhibit throughout the Christian age and not such as will be characteristic of men only in the last part of the last age of the world. We are in the last age of the world but who can say that we are in the last part of the last age? Paul does not say anything of the kind. He is describing sinful men that were living

also in his time. (2 Tim. 3:5.) It is high time that these misinterpreters of Paul use their consciences more and their skill for manipulating and accommodating his language less.

Another class of interpreters, approaching the subject from a different standpoint, assure us that the coming of Christ is yet a great way off, many centuries. Dr. James H. Snowden, in sympathy with certain arguments drawn from astronomy, anthropology and geology, concludes that “this planet is a ship stocked for a long voyage” yet, indeed, that the “world is only in the morning of its day and humanity is only in its infancy.” Accordingly he puts “the end of the world in a remote future.” (*The Coming of the Lord*, pp. 79, 81, 143.) He also thinks that “the man of sin” foretold by Paul has not yet appeared, (p. 165.) As to this last argument I hold that he is “dead wrong.” As to the scientific argument, that there are no signs that the earth is wearing out or that a chaos of the heavenly bodies is approaching, I consider it of insignificant value. Scientists are more to be relied upon when they tell us what has been, or, even, what may be, than when they tell us what will not be. The God I believe in is capable of surprising the scientists. Jesus said, “of that day and hour knoweth no one.” That includes scientists and theologians both.

Dr. B. H. Carroll, who does not stress scientific considerations as does Dr. Snowden but moral and social ideals that are, he thinks, yet to be realized, concludes that the final coming of Christ is yet far in the future. It is a noble conception that he presents, but his arguments are not convincing. The extent to which the world is to be Christianized is certainly not revealed. We know that believers and unbelievers will be intermixed but in what ratio we know not. His view, like Dr. Snowden’s, that Paul’s “man of sin” has not yet appeared is far astray. (*Revelation*, pp. 288, 289.) Paul says the power of the “lawless one” was already at work when he was

writing. (2 Thess. 2:7.) He considers that a “falling away” will occur when the “man of sin” comes upon the scene. (2 Thess. 2:3.) Later Paul speaks of a defection, revealed to him by the Spirit, as already at hand. (1 Tim. 4:1-6. Cf. Acts 20:29, 30.) It most certainly is the same reaction that he foretells to the Thessalonians. Peter also seems to be aware of some such apostasy as close at hand while he was yet alive. (2 Pet. 2:1, 2.) Jesus foretold a defection. (Matt. 24:10-12.) And John still later speaks of an apostasy as having already occurred and connects it with the coming of antichrist and the last age. (1 John 2:18, 19.)

Dr. Carroll works out his interpretation upon the theory that the kingdom of God on earth is a “visible kingdom,” that “the Devil will not get the majority of the human race,” that in the millennium, which will come before Christ’s return, “good people will be on top in every kind of government.” (pp. 297, 273, 274.) But it does not seem possible to establish any of these positions; certainly not all of them. He understands the statement in the parable of the Talents, “after a long time the Lord of those servants cometh,” to signify a time yet far in the future to us. (p. 305, Cf. Matt. 25:19.) This is, of course, a pure assumption. His argument to the effect that we are not to expect the return of Christ now is a fatal error.

If all interpreters would realize that they are ever to expect the coming of the Lord and not to speculate as to when he will or will not come, and that, when they deal in arguments that tend to change the attitude of “watchful waiting” into a feeling either of cocksureness or of indifference, they are doing just what Christ forbade them to do, they would be kept from many errors.

The Lord will come in his own appointed time. He will come quickly, as he measures time. He will not hurry, and he will not be detained. Nor will he linger.

I have just read an article in which the writer uses the expression,

“if the Lord tarryes.” This expression is often found in certain writers and speakers who have occasion to refer to the second coming of Christ.

Is it proper to imply that Christ may *tarry* in regard to his second coming or indeed in regard to anything? Of course, it depends on what we mean by *tarrying*. The word has two distinct meanings: to abide and to linger, to remain in a given place for a purpose, and wisely, and to remain there idly, “killing time.” The latter meaning is the more common and the more appropriate. When reverent people speak of Christ *tarrying*, they have the former thought in mind, of course. But the word *tarry* is not the best word to use to express that thought. And if they should use another expression for the same idea, as “if the Lord continues to abide away,” they would discover that their thought, as well as their words, is rather weak.

Those who use this expression in referring to the return of Christ have not, perhaps, considered that they have no right so to use it, for the simple reason that the Bible puts it in the mouth of an evil servant. “If that evil servant shall say in his heart, my Lord tarrieth,” etc. (Matt. 24:48; Cf. Luke 12:45.) He used the word in the second sense as given above. It is the more fitting use of it. In this sense it signifies to while away the time, to spend the time to no purpose. The servant would express his impatience with his Lord. This is the natural and proper suggestion that accompanies the word. If one shrinks from this thought, he should not use the word.

It is very curious that devout people should, through lack of thought, take up the language of mockers. Our Lord *does not tarry*. “For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” (Heb. 10:37.) In a parable we read “the bridegroom tarried” (Matt. 25:5), but in that point his similarity to Christ is apparent only, not real. Scoffers, I say, may think so of Christ, but believers never. (Cf. 2 Pet. 3:3, 4.) The last word of Christ to his people is,

“Yea, I come quickly.” (Rev. 22:20.)

Let us get our phraseology right. It may help us to get our theology right.

What then, is the attitude Christians should sustain toward the final coming of Christ?

I have often said that it is the attitude of expectation, of joyous and triumphant expectation. They are to believe in it, to desire it, to wait and watch for it. A Christian should lie down to sleep thinking that it may be before the morning dawns. He should rise believing that it may be before the going down of the sun. He ought so earnestly to desire it that his spirit will often be repeating the apostle John’s prayer, “Amen: come, Lord Jesus.” Any other attitude of mind toward it breaks Christ’s plain commandment, is the result of ambition to taste the fruit of a forbidden tree of knowledge, leads to profitless speculation and hinders spiritual and practical results in all Christian activities. It is a fact that many preachers spend more time advocating some theory as to the second coming of Christ than they do getting the world to believe in his first coming, of which two-thirds of the human race have not as yet even heard.

The expectant attitude toward the return of Christ depends on five accepted facts: the momentous nature of the event, the certainty of its happening, the definitely fixed date of it, the impossibility of our discerning the date, and Christian character.

On the first two points I need not dwell. If it is to be, and we believe it is, it will be the most wonderful of events and experiences. We need not be interested in an event of no moment.

But if one lives in expectation of an event, he must believe that it will certainly happen. Now the final coming of Christ is so certain that it is fixed in the purpose of God. Jesus implied this when he said that only the Father knew when it would be. (Cf. Acts 1:7.) Paul affirmed it at Athens when he said that God had appointed a

day in which he would judge the world by Jesus Christ. (Acts 17:31.) It is then a day already determined. It is marked in God's calendar. It will not be changed; it will not be moved either backward or forward. It would seem then that any attempt on the part of Christians, however devout, to hasten the coming of the Lord is nothing other than a pious blunder. Certainly Peter is not to be understood as telling his readers that they are to do this, but, as the American Standard version translates the passage, that they are to be "earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God." (2 Pet. 3:12. Cf. John 8:56.)

But to us the time is uncertain. Jesus said to his disciples: "It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority." (Acts 1:7.) Why should this be? Why does God not tell us? Simply because our lives here on the earth must be lived in uncertainty. That is the way in which character is grown. So, we do not as a rule know the time of our death. It is easy to see that, if we did, the knowledge would be an injury to us. God "kindly veils our eyes." God's moral purpose with men would be hopelessly defeated if the time of the end were definitely made known. If every lie scorched the tongue immediately, there would be no virtue in telling the truth. In the delay of the sentence of judgment is the possibility of character. For this reason, God keeps the world in the suspense of uncertainty.

If we apply these simple principles to the situation of the apostles some difficulties will vanish away. They, too, had to live in a great degree of uncertainty. Christ revealed to Peter that he would die in a specific way. Peter and some others then knew that Jesus would not return while he was alive. But they did not know when Peter might die. And they rather expected that Jesus would come back while John was living. (John 21:18-23.)

Paul had revelations given to him concerning the time of the

return. He, therefore, lived in expectation of it with such liberty of thought as was consistent with these revelations. To say that Paul was mistaken in his teaching on this subject is a most superficial blunder. When he wrote to the Thessalonians, he knew that Christ was not to come back *just then*. But we have shown that he was, at the very close of his life, looking for it. He did not know how soon and how quickly the “lawless one” might be released and the accompanying apostasy break loose. It is very evident, however, to one who knows rhetoric, that, when Paul classes himself with the living at Christ’s return, as he does in the first epistles to the Thessalonians and Corinthians, he has no settled conviction of the imminency of it, as some, who are bent on proving that Paul was mistaken, ambitiously affirm. (1 Thess. 4:15, 17; 1 Cor. 15:51.) Augustine understood correctly that Paul, by the pronoun “we,” “personated” those who would be alive when Christ comes. (*City of God*, 20, 20.) There is a great difference between expecting Christ’s coming while one is alive and having the doctrinal conviction that he will come in that space of time. Paul had the former state of mind. He did not have the latter. Christ commanded the former. He forbade the latter. Some critics do not see this important distinction. He who says that Christ will return in this decade or in this generation makes as great a blunder as he who says that he will return in the next decade or the next generation or any specific future decade or generation. Both are too headstrong to know the mind of Christ on this subject as revealed in the New Testament. As for me, since I know what Christ himself has plainly said, I know also that these ambitious prayers into forbidden secrets are talking out of the profound depths of their willful ignorance.

John had the same expectant mind as did Peter and Paul, modified also by the revelations granted to him.

In conclusion, notice how Peter and Paul and Christ all denounce

the disposition to find some excuse for not expecting his coming. Peter calls such persons “scoffers.” (2 Pet. 3:3.) Paul compares them with those that “sleep” and “drink” and carouse. (1 Thess. 5:7.) Jesus said that it is the “evil servant” that says, “My Lord tarrieth.” (Matt. 24:45.)

“He who testifieth these things saith, Yea: I come quickly. Amen: come, Lord Jesus.” (Rev. 22:20.)

CHAPTER 8 – THE QUESTION OF THE MILLENNIUM

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;
Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales;
Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a ghastly
dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue;
Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind rushing
warm,
With the standards of the peoples plunging thro' the
thunderstorm;
Till the war-drum throb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were
furl'd
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.
There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in
awe,
And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law.
So I triumph'd ere my passion sweeping thro' me left me dry,
Left me with the palsied heart, and left me with the jaundiced
eye;
Eye to which all order festers, all things here are out of joint:
Science moves, but slowly, slowly, creeping on from point to
point:
Slowly comes a hungry people, as a lion creeping nigher,
Glares at one that nods and winks behind a slowly-dying fire.
Yet I doubt not thro' the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widen'd with the process of the

suns.

—Tennyson.

Millennium is a word made from two Latin words that mean a thousand years. It has come into common use in English to signify an age, more or less definitely conceived, of moral and religious prosperity, the golden age of the world.

The relation of the final coming of Christ to the millennium is one of the great problems of Biblical interpretation. According as one fixes the time of that great event before or after the millennium is he a premillennialist or a postmillennialist.

Is it a question of any moment? Does it matter whether a Christian holds to one view rather than the other? It does matter very much. He is quite thoughtless who says it makes no difference what standpoint we take. Again, one who becomes an efficient interpreter of the Holy Scriptures must be either a premillennialist or a postmillennialist. He cannot be both; he must be one or the other. Every Christian must believe in a millennium, a millennium of some kind.

There are two classes under each of the general divisions just given. Some premillennialists think that Christ will, upon his return, strip Satan of all his power, banish all sin from the world, renew the kingdom of David, reign upon a literal throne in Jerusalem, or some center of government, set up there again the service of the temple, and from thence send forth with compelling power his law and bring every human being on the face of the earth under his beneficent sway. The gospel, as they understand it, is not to leaven society and save many but is rather a testimony to the world and a means of rescuing a few. The program of the Commission is to accomplish little. Other dispensations have ended in failure and so will this one.

The world is on the toboggan and must hit the bottom. When the crash comes Christ will come and upon the ruins build the millennium, which is the reign of Christ in person for an exact one thousand years. Premillennialists of the more pronounced type insist upon all these points and many others of a like kind.

Premillennialists of the milder type hold to the first four points given above, and to certain of the others but not to all of them. They are not so sure as to how Christ will rule and execute his will. They have more regard for the program of the Commission. They are not so reactionary and aggressive as are the first class mentioned.

All premillennialists think that the millennium will be a literal reign of Christ in person on the earth for one thousand years and that he will institute it when he comes again.

Postmillennialists are also of two kinds. A few think the millennium will be a period of exactly a thousand years, quite well defined; that it will be an age characterized by the dominance of Christian men and moral principles; that, though evil will not be banished entirely from the world, it will be greatly suppressed, and righteousness will be in the ascendance, in society, in business, in politics, everywhere. They interpret Rev. 20:1-10 as largely figurative.

But the great majority of postmillennialists understand the language concerning the millennium in Rev. 20:1-10 as wholly, or almost wholly, figurative. It is not a period of a thousand years. It is a period of the reign of grace, of the prosperity of Christianity, a part of the gospel age, perhaps the principal part of it or, it may be, all of it. It is not well defined. We do not know when we enter into it. We may now be in it and near the end of it. We may indeed, be passing out of it. While it would be unfair to say that this class of postmillennialists do not take Rev. 20:1-10 seriously, it should be frankly stated that they consider this passage of Scripture as little

more than a vivid description in concrete terms of the power of Christianity in the world and of the moral beauty and influence of the lives of regenerated men and women, especially the martyrs. They refuse to put more meaning into the passage in Revelation than is found in the teaching of the parables and plain statements elsewhere in the Bible with reference to the kingdom. The millennium as a utopian state on earth they do not accept. They are optimistic in regard to the Great Commission. They believe that the kingdom of God will leaven and transform the nations and peoples of the world, but absolute blessedness is to be realized only in heaven itself. To this class the writer belongs.

I do not believe that Christ and the apostles are committed to the doctrine of a millennium such as many believe in. I think such a utopian age is the product of dreamers. It is created by the imagination and not educed by sound criticism. I have watched carefully for a quarter of a century the ways of the Bible interpreters, to whom I refer, and I would not for my right hand handle the Word of God so fancifully, arbitrarily, and unscientifically as they do.

On the other hand, I recoil, as from leprosy, from that view which holds that Christ and the apostles adopted the Jewish dream of a millennial age, an age that is now seen to be impossible. (Cf. Case in *Millennial Hope*, pp. 92, 106, 112, 151.) The Jewish doctrine of the millennium is not found at all in Christ or Paul or Peter and the language of Revelation, when properly interpreted, does not contain it. Peter's language shows that he would have no patience with those who would undertake to measure off for the Lord a thousand-year period. (2 Pet. 3:8.) I agree that the millennium of the premillennialists is impossible, both from scientific reasons and from Biblical reasons. That an anti- millennialist should adopt the false interpretation of the premillennialists and then reject it as a

false Jewish hope incorporated in the Bible is an interesting procedure. It is no compliment to either of them. It is abominable.

Both the premillennialists and the anti-millennialists, just referred to, make the common error of not taking into account all the data. Neither hypothesis explains all the facts.

Examine practically the scheme of premillennialism, and see that it is impossible. Christ returns in person and takes his people up in the air with him for a while, which is the so-called “rapture,” all proof of which, as soon as it is examined vanishes into thin air. Then he comes back with them and begins his reign in Jerusalem, or some center of government, from whence he brings all the world under his sway. The righteous dead are raised up, some of whom sit with him on his throne. Satan is bound; that is, his power is taken away completely. There is no evil in the earth. How will Christ reign? By moral suasion or force? Not by moral suasion, as he does now, which method is proving a failure, but by force; in which case Christ’s kingdom will be essentially different from what it is now. Jesus said: “My kingdom is not of this world,” meaning that it is not to be established by force. The nature of the kingdom in the millennium must, therefore, be other than it is now. For this reason, most, if not all, premillennialists contend that this age is not the age of the kingdom at all. Therefore, if we have the kingdom now, and we do, their idea of the millennium is impossible.

Again, all premillennialists, so far as I know, consider that in the millennium this earth will be as it is now; there will be the two hemispheres and the five continents, the oceans, rivers and mountain systems as we now have them. There will be the same seasons, the same forces and laws of nature, the same means of travel and communication. How then will Christ get his will done perfectly? If space and time intervene as obstacles in the execution of Christ’s will, and human nature is not in itself perfect, it is impossible to get

perfect results in the execution of his will. But is human nature to be perfect in the millennium? Are all born holy in the millennium? Or is there no propagation of the human species then? If human nature is perfect why should there be the same kind of physical world that there is now, a world fitted for sinful men, not perfect men?

Millennial men require a corresponding millennial material environment, but this would be much more than a millennium. So far as I am aware no premillennialist pictures for us a millennium without the heat of summer, the cold of winter, the laws of gravitation and motion, which all cause accidents, suffering and death to men in natural bodies.

If Christ sits upon a throne, located in a certain place, he can be communicated with personally by a few only. Some will be twelve thousand miles away, with seas, deserts, mountains and rivers intervening. They will be put to a disadvantage. For men in the millennium will be hindered by space and distance, as they are now. But this inequality makes a premillennial millennium impossible.

Once more, if men in the millennium have natural bodies as they must have to be citizens in a material world controlled by natural law, they will be subject to accidents, pain and death, all of which are impossible in a perfect millennium. But, if it be said that in the millennium the saints have glorified bodies, and live in a glorified world, then it is not the millennium at all that is thought of but heaven itself. There are three spheres or states of human existence, heaven, hell and this mundane sphere as it now is. There is no need of a fourth; nor is it possible except as a utopian creation of an impractical imagination.

If one should say that he is a premillennialist but that he is unable to give even an outline of what the millennium is to be, then he confesses that he does not know what he is talking about. He is like the Irishman who does not know what he wants but wants it right

now.

The method of interpreting the Scriptures used by premillennialists is faulty. They start with a certain interpretation of Rev. 20:1-10 and then work their idea back into the epistles and Gospels. Now the book of Revelation is confessedly difficult to understand. It is predictive prophecy set forth in visions, symbols and figures. It is a marvelous piece of work and as mysterious as marvelous. It is an ordered delirium of words. Therefore, to base on this one passage alone a certain view of Christ, the kingdom and the future, and then attempt to read it into the plainer passages of Scripture, or to bend these passages to an unnatural meaning to fit and reinforce this view is most unjustifiable. It is impossible to get to the light in this way. The opposite method is the only proper one. First, to understand the plain statements and the parables of Christ concerning the kingdom and the future and armed with this knowledge to attack Revelation.

I cite three examples of the method of which I complain.

Paul says: "The dead in Christ shall rise first." (1 Thess. 4:16.) Here Paul is not comparing the dead in Christ with the dead out of Christ, as many premillennialists assume. He is saying not a word about the unsaved, dead or living, nor is he thinking of them. He is comparing the dead in Christ with the living in Christ at his final coming.

Some twenty years ago a preacher of note, a doctor of divinity, and I were conversing on the subject of the kingdom. Naturally we came to speak of the parables. To my surprise he said that in the parable of the Mustard Seed the statement, "the birds of the heaven come and lodge in the branches thereof" (Matt. 13:32), signifies the foul influences that were to settle down upon the kingdom. I was on the point of laughing when I noticed that he was really serious. Since then I have learned that it is a common way, premillennialists

have, of interpreting this parable. It is so ludicrous that I hardly know whether I should take time to correct it. Jesus is giving us a word picture of the growth of the kingdom by contrasting the size of the mustard plant when full grown with the smallness of the seed. When a boy on the farm I often saw the very thing Jesus described, mustard plants growing high and spreading out their branches above the field of flax, which was then a common crop in Missouri, and the birds resting themselves in these branches. Jesus was doing just one thing with this parable, teaching that the kingdom of heaven which was then small was going to be great. The clause referred to is a touch by the great artist to picture to us this thought. To say that this parable teaches an unnatural growth of the kingdom, in that a vegetable becomes a tree, or that it points to the corruption of the kingdom, since birds in the Bible always symbolize what is filthy, is absurd. Not every fowl in the Bible signifies what is foul. The dove, for example, symbolizes the very opposite. This little parable certainly was not intended to teach just anything and everything that fertile fancy may invent. But there is nothing that we can do for one who has such wings to his imagination, except to wait until he grows more feathers in the tail of his judgment.

Following the parable of the Mustard Seed in Matthew comes the parable of the Leaven, a short parable of one verse. (Matt. 13:33.) This also teaches the corruption of the kingdom, say these same interpreters, since leaven in the Bible always signifies the principle of evil. The idea that leaven signifies evil has been “worked overtime.” Its exclusion from the bread of the Passover pointed to the *haste* in which they quitted Egypt. They had no time then to wait for yeast to rise. The very purpose of the Passover with its specified details was to *commemorate* that great event and thus to get the world ready to appreciate the greater event of which it was prophetic. Leaven in the Bible does not always signify the principle

of evil. Sometimes it does and sometimes it does not. In Lev. 7:13 and 23:17 it does not. But if it were so used in every other passage of the Bible, this alone would not prove that it signifies the corruption of the kingdom here. A speaker may use words as he wishes to. There are no mechanical rules for rhetoric. If there were there would be no rhetoric. Peter compared Satan to a lion and John called Christ a lion. Both knew well what they were doing. Jesus compared himself in his final coming to a thief coming to steal. He certainly knew how to handle words. Now if he wanted to teach that the kingdom is going to work in the world as leaven works in dough, spreading through it, giving to it its own quality and making wholesome what would otherwise be heavy and unhealthful bread, that it is to convert and transform the world, as it is said, “the kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ” (Rev. 11:15), he did well to use such an illustration. Was there a better way of expressing this thought? That Jesus did intend that his kingdom should convert and transform the world, or some important part of it, is proved by the Great Commission and by the passage just quoted from Revelation.

But to say that leaven in this parable signifies an evil principle is to say entirely too much. Interpreters who affirm this certainly do not see to what it leads. Jesus says, “the kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven.” If leaven symbolizes evil here, he teaches, not that the kingdom will be corrupted, but that it is itself the corrupting principle. He does not liken the kingdom to the meal in which the leaven is put, but to the leaven itself. Now did anyone of those persons listening to Jesus, who knew that leaven was necessary for good, wholesome bread, imagine that he was talking of something evil? It is absurd. If some interpreters would pay attention to the simple principles of psychology and rhetoric and to the simple rules of grammar they would not blunder so unfortunately. They need

more “salt in themselves.” If their thought also contained more of the leaven of common sense it would be more profitable. It is admitted, however, that if the kingdom is to be corrupted, if it is to lose its power, if it is to be overcome by the world instead of overcoming the world, then we must find some other way of interpreting these parables than the way here suggested, that is, we must give to them an unnatural, if not an impossible, meaning. But the natural meaning of the language in each case is that which we have assigned to it. The idea that the kingdom is to grow and powerfully affect the world and not succumb to it is taught throughout the Bible. Why should one labor to prove the opposite view, a view that is disheartening, discouraging and deadening?

Now this theory that the kingdom is to be corrupted I would like to nail to a cross. There is not one single proof of it. It is an assumption and wholly unsupported.

A church may be corrupted. There are few, I am sure, that do not have in them some people of the world. Any organization may be corrupted. Man may be corrupted. Everything that is visible may be corrupted. But the kingdom of God cannot be corrupted. Light cannot be corrupted. If it passes through fetid atmosphere it is as pure as when it left the sun. Truth cannot be corrupted. If it is buried under the rubbish of lies, if it is trampled in the mire, there it still is as untarnished as when it went forth from the thought of God. “No lie is of the truth.” (1 John 2:21.) As light and truth cannot be corrupted, so the kingdom of God cannot be corrupted. It is the safety vault which God himself built. No explosive can crack the door. No demon can pick the lock. No flame can melt the hinges. No poison from the miasma of the world can penetrate the walls to corrode its treasures. It is rust-proof, moth-proof, fire-proof, error-proof.

I know that there are a few passages of Scripture which may seem

at first to teach that the kingdom may be corrupted but when examined carefully they will be found not to do so. For example, Jesus likened the kingdom to a drag-net, “that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but the bad they cast away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. 13:47- 50.)

Now it is evident that Jesus by this parable is describing what we see going on all the time. The gospel is preached, and all sorts of people profess to accept it. Of these some are saved, and some are not. Behold the mongrel mixture that makes up Christendom to-day. Take any body of organized Christians: there are among them, we know, many that are not real believers. This was the case in the beginning of Christianity. Judas, one of the apostles in Jesus’ own company, was a “son of perdition.” (John 17:12.) Simon, the sorcerer, professed to believe, and was baptized and was counted a real believer, but was not. (Acts 8:9-24.) Did Jesus mean to say that the bad things in the net represent evil people in the kingdom, such people as will, in the judgment, be cast into the “furnace of fire”? Of course, he did not. He meant to say the very opposite, namely, that God knows who and what they are and will in time send them to their own place. The parable of the Tares, which Jesus himself explained, teaches this truth most plainly. (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43.) The “good seed” are the “sons of the kingdom” and the “tares” are the “sons of the evil one”; they “grow together,” not in the kingdom but in the world, for Jesus says, “the field is the world.” But even in this parable, which plainly states that believers and unbelievers are intermixed in the world, not in the kingdom, he says: “And they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and

them that do iniquity.” That is, in the same breath Jesus speaks of the same class of persons as both outside of and within his kingdom. But it is obvious that they were only considered as in the kingdom but were really not, which is the fact Jesus is emphasizing. It is a very important truth that we here face and one that was taught often by Jesus. My belief is that he chose Judas to be one of the Twelve partly, if not wholly, for the purpose of teaching by example this very thing. It was absolutely essential that his disciples should know and be prepared for this condition. Paul knew it. “Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his: and, Let everyone that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness.” (2 Tim. 2:19.) One who understands the gospel of the grace of God cannot hold that saved men will be lost. Now all that are in the kingdom are saved, as we have before proved, which, indeed, needs no proving to those who understand the gospel. Accordingly, it is impossible that any that are in the kingdom should be cast into the “furnace of fire.” Therefore, the bad things in the drag-net do not signify evil people in the kingdom, or a corruption of the kingdom, but evil people who consider themselves, and are considered by others, as in the kingdom.

Bad people are not in the kingdom but in the world and the bad acts that Christians do are not their acts as Christians but as people of the world, or as having the world in them. As it has been pointedly said of the Israelites, that it took God only a little while to get them out of Egypt but a long while to get Egypt out of them, so we may say of Christians, that, while by one blessed experience they get out of the world, it is by many hard experiences the world is gotten out of them. But good people, if we understand what is meant by good people, are all in the kingdom and bad people, if we understand what is meant by bad people, are all in the world. No one

of either class is in the other sphere. No man is in both spheres and there is no third class. As God sees man, and he sees them as they are, there are only two classes, good and bad, saved and unsaved, in the kingdom and in the world, for Christ and against him. "There shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life." (Rev. 21:27.)

There is another assumption of premillennialism that ought not to be granted, namely, that the world is getting worse. I do not think it is. I think it is getting better. We cannot make an extended discussion of this question but must be content simply to analyze it and suggest the line of argument.

What is meant by the statement that the world is getting better? Not that the world in itself is getting better. It gets neither better nor worse. The spirit of the world is ever the same. It is against Christ. It always has been and always will be. Nor is it meant that unregenerate men are becoming better. They may become even worse, as they have more light and do not receive it.

We mean that there are more good men than there were formerly. If the number of good men is growing less, then certainly the world is growing worse. We mean that these good men in general have a better quality of goodness than good men in general had in former ages. There have been in all ages outstanding and pre-eminent characters that should not be thought of in this comparison. We speak of the average standard of Christian living of this and former ages. We mean that the proportion of good men to bad men is greater in this age than in former ages; that good men are increasing more rapidly than bad men. We mean that the forces that make for righteousness are more numerous and more potent now than ever before, holding in check more effectively the forces of evil.

One cannot be a competent judge of this question without a

knowledge of history. But many have some knowledge of history, enough to permit them to form a tentative judgment. Slavery is passing, the saloon is passing, despotism is passing, idolatry is passing, polygamy is passing, certain forms of cruelties are passing. With the World War fresh in our minds I do not hesitate to say that the outrages and inhumanities committed in it, terrible as they were, were not equal to some that have been practiced in past ages.

Some good things are coming. Science, a natural good, is here. The means of disseminating knowledge rapidly are here. Useful inventions are here. Advanced methods of medical treatment are here, relieving much suffering. There is a more general appreciation of good principles than ever before, such as the brotherhood of man, and the rights of women and children. There are more Bibles in the world than ever before, and they are studied more. There are more missionaries now than ever before. The gospel is preached and printed in more languages. More men and women are teaching in Sunday schools and more people are attending Sunday schools. Spiritual conceptions of God and moral ideals prevail now more than in any former age. There is much evil; the shadows of night hang heavy over the world; but the day is becoming brighter and brighter. I am glad to believe it. As a student of history, I can believe it. As a Christian I must believe it. To doubt it would be for me to doubt Christ.

“Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this.” (Ecc. 7:10.)

Premillennialism is naturally pessimistic with regard to the program of Christ for this age. It cannot help but minimize the Commission. Since the kingdom of Christ is not now to be established there is not much for them to do. One premillennialist has said boldly that “the baptism of Matt. 28:19 is a kingdom

baptism, connected with the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom, after the rapture of the church.” Christians, it is contended, are simply to witness for Christ but not with the expectation of making him king. If they attempt to make disciples of all the nations, they are foredoomed to failure. They should not expect to accomplish this result. Many premillennialists do not go so far as I have indicated but this is premillennialism. They are all moving in that direction. Some know how to put on the brakes and some do not. I fear that premillennialism is resorted to by some as a covering for their indifference and reactionary spirit. Their claim to superior piety is sad and pitiable.

How different from all this is the thought of Christ. “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (Jno. 16:33.)

There is another conclusive argument against premillennialism, which is not often stressed. It is this: the return of Christ and the winding up of this age will be accomplished with such divine judgments and such radical changes in the earth and the heavens that the millennium after these events will be impossible. There will take place at Christ’s final coming the cataclysm of the universe, “the wreck of matter and crash of worlds.”

Jesus in his forecasting of the last things puts the destruction of Jerusalem before his return, but he considers his return and the termination of this age as two phases of the same event. That is, they will happen at the same time. He describes the ending of this age in terms that indicate that the next age will have nothing in common with it. This age will not pass gradually or imperceptibly into the next, as the age before Christ passed into the Christian age. But this age will end abruptly. This age is the age of probation and the determining of destinies. That age is the age of determined destinies. There is no probation in that age. The final judgment takes place when Jesus comes. Opportunity for salvation will cease then. The

physical changes in the earth and the heavens will be so great that it is useless to compare life and conditions on the earth then with what they are now. Some of these ideas are set forth plainly in the statements of Jesus, but the germs of the others are also there and are developed more fully by Peter and Paul.

The physical changes Jesus describes thus: “The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven.” (Matt. 24:29.) In the parable of the Ten Virgins the sentence, “and the door was shut,” means that the destinies of the two classes of men, the saved corresponding to the “wise virgins,” who are inside, and the unsaved, corresponding to the “foolish virgins,” who are outside, are fixed. (Matt. 25:1-13.) Under these circumstances there can be no campaign for the salvation of sinners or for the establishing of the kingdom of Christ. The preaching of the gospel is for this age and no other. Jesus concludes his discourse with a description of the final judgment in which he affirms again that on his return the destinies of the two classes of men, the “blessed” and the “cursed,” shall be eternally fixed. When Jesus comes probation ends and eternal destinies begin.

It should be kept in mind that the doctrine of the so-called “rapture” is a theological fiction, pure and simple. The ground for it, like the sphere of its existence, is, I repeat, thin air.

Peter develops considerably the ideas of Jesus concerning the physical changes and the cessation of probation. He says that the world “perished” once by means of water and it will perish the next time by means of fire, which will have intensity of heat sufficient to melt the very elements and to dissolve the very heavens so that the heavens will pass away and the earth will be burned up. If they do not disappear entirely, they will be so changed as to be “new heavens and a new earth.” He reveals his belief that probation will end when the day of the Lord comes, and that what some count

slackness in the Lord, concerning his promise to return, is on the contrary longsuffering and a desire that none should “perish but that all should come to repentance.” That is, Christ does not return at once because he wants to give men opportunity to be saved. The “day of the Lord” will be “the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.” Peter understands that hell for the wicked, that are on the earth, will begin when Christ returns. All these events take place at the return of Christ, not at a later date. (2 Pet. 3:1-13, 15.)

Paul speaks of Christ’s return as a revelation in “flaming fire” (2 Thess. 1:7), and teaches that creation itself is to undergo a radical change, a change so great that, whereas the world is now suited to us in our state of “pain and groaning,” it will then be suited to us in our glorified and resurrection state. That is, that creation is to experience a resurrection or redemption corresponding to the “redemption of the body.” (Rom. 8:18-25.) This is a change too revolutionary and far-reaching for any premillennial scheme. In harmony with this conception Paul understands that final awards will be made when Christ comes again. He says that he will then “render vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at in all them that believed (because our testimony unto you was believed) in that day.” (2 Thess. 1:8-10.) Paul, as Jesus and Peter, teaches that when Jesus comes again heaven and hell will begin for all those that are on earth. God will not wait longer to judge sinners. Not another day of grace will be given them. The sweet note of the gospel will be heard no more; for the gospel is good news to sinners only who have hope of salvation.

I conclude, therefore, since a premillennial millennium is impossible, and since also a postmillennial millennium of a definite

one thousand years, so well defined that we will know when we enter into it, is inconstant with the expectation of Christ's return, enjoined upon all Christians, that the one thousand years of Rev. 20:1-10 cannot be taken literally and cannot mean anything else than an indefinite period. Other reasons also for this conclusion will be given in the next chapter.

“But forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.” (2 Pet. 3:8.)

CHAPTER 9 – AN INTERPRETATION OF REVELATION 20:1-10

“Ye are the salt of the earth.” (Matt. 5:13.)

“Ye are the light of the world.” (Matt. 5:14.)

“Verily I say unto you, that ye who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matt. 19:28.)

The temptation to make an extended exposition of this noted passage is great, but space forbids it. We must be content with a brief treatment of the subject, with little more than an outline of an interpretation.

Before coming to the specific passage to be considered let us call to mind certain general and important principles that must guide us if we would get at the truth we are seeking.

1. First, the book of Revelation is in the main a book of predictions. Now all such Biblical writings are difficult to understand. This is true of both Old Testament and New Testament literature of this character. Of the latter we have good examples in Jesus' discourse to his disciples in the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of Matthew and in the second chapter of Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians. But the problems of Revelation far surpass those of any other book of the Bible. There is something in the very nature of predictive prophecy that makes it hard to interpret. As has been said, all unveiling of the future is in part only, and is accompanied also by a veiling. The rays of the telescopic vision of inspired prophets penetrate far into the future and bring many objects into the light, but in the process some dark shadows

are necessarily created. Let us be thankful for so much that is visible and not try to see what the shadows hide from our view. It is intended that our vision be limited. Augustine well says that “prophetic diction delights in mingling figurative and real language, and thus in some sort veiling the sense.” (*City of God*. 20, 16.)

2. Secondly, while Revelation is in the main a forecasting of “the things which must shortly come to pass,” (22:6), some things of past history are described. This is necessary as a background for the event of future history that is then foretold. Consider 12:1-9. Our passage requires the application of this principle.

3. Thirdly, as Dr. E. Y. Mullins has said, “John in his vision passes from earth to heaven and back again at will.” This is an important observation. At times, indeed, it is difficult to tell whether the Revelator is describing what is in the lower sphere or what is in the higher. Study, for example, 21:1-22:5. To the apostle John physical death is but an incident. If one has fellowship with God, if he is in the kingdom, the “article of death” is a small item. The kingdom of God is both in heaven and on earth. It is “the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” (21:10.) The saved are citizens of this city now. (21:27.) Paul has the same conception. (Phil. 3:20.) So valuable is this consideration that we may say it is one of the keys for the unlocking of the mysteries of the book. We will need to use it when we come to interpret verses four, five and six of our passage.

4. Fourthly, Revelation is mainly a book of visions. Now visions are scenes and sounds that appeal to the eye and ear. They are made out of physical things and are represented in terms that correspond thereto. There is, of course, a difference between the vision and its meaning. (Cf. Gen. 40:8-19; 41:1-32; Dan. 2:1-49; Acts 10:9-17; 16:9-10.) Again, since a vision is itself a symbol of something, or a picture of it drawn in material lines and colors, it is necessary that

some parts of it have less significance than others and that some parts may have no significance or meaning at all. They have a place in the vision or picture but are not intended to teach anything. This is true of the parables also.

Revelation is a book of visions, pictures, symbols, and figures of speech and must be interpreted as such. There is action and vividness. But we must not infer that the writer loses himself or does not know what he is about. There is method in all his movements and ecstatic flights. He reaches the highest altitudes of apocalyptic aviation, but he lands on the ground safely.

The Revelator describes himself as “in the Spirit.” (1:10.) Once he tells of his intensely agitated emotions. (5:4.) However, he is not “drunk with wine but is filled with the spirit.” (Cf. Acts, 2:13-15; Eph. 5:18.) The book seems to be a wild delirium of speech, but it is not. It is well ordered. The writer seems to the uninitiated to reel to and fro like a drunk man and to be falling. But he is not. He keeps his balance and plants his foot solidly. He knows what he wants to do, and he does it in a dramatic way, as a skilled actor, using scenes and words with precision to effect a desired result.

5. Fifthly, is there some specific rule or principle yet more definite that will help us in our task? Yes, and stated bluntly, it is this:

In Revelation often one thing is said, and another is meant.

I may almost say that this is the rule in the book. We should not be afraid to admit this principle and to put it to use. It is the very principle of the symbol and the figure of speech to say one thing and mean another. It is the very principle of the parable also. If one is disposed to be contentious on this point, let him consider further that this principle is the very principle of language itself. A word is the sign of an idea. The audible sound or the visible letter stands for the thought that is neither heard nor seen. The character of the style of

Revelation demands the application of this principle. It is essential, to an approach to the mysteries of Revelation. If one will not follow this lead, he must stand afar off and remain ignorant, or, what is much worse, make fanciful and harmful interpretations.

Now the way one faces the question of figurative language is very interesting. He may be inclined to find figures of speech everywhere. He may refuse to see them anywhere. Or he may see them where he wants to see them and refuse to see them where he does not want to see them. He may be very arbitrary on the subject.

For example, Martin Luther contended that Jesus' statement, "this is my body" (Matt. 26:26), means just what it says. With a willful dogmatism he affirms: "Christ has said, 'This is my body.' Let them show me a body that is not a body. I reject reason, common sense, carnal arguments, and mathematical proofs. God is above mathematics. We have the word of God; we must adore it and perform it." (Quoted by Snowden in *The Coming of the Lord*, p. 197.) This mad monk, in some respects strong, in other respects weak, was in a tight place and, as in the case of David once, his only way of salvation was to play the fool, which he did with a show of success. He did not see, that, if he was proving anything, he was proving more than consubstantiation, even transubstantiation. It is too bad that most of the world at that time was either going after the "beast" or after this parboiled priest.

And yet many deal with the passage we are to consider with a like unreason. They are willing to see symbols and figures of speech everywhere else in Revelation except in this instance, where they contend, the language must mean just what it says. Reason, common sense, mathematical principles and even the plain meaning of the word of God in scores of passages do not have any weight with them. Of course, we cannot reason with those who, like Luther reject reason; but we may save some from error, who have not yet

gotten into such a hopeless mental state.

In order that the symbol or figure of speech, that is, the saying of one thing and the meaning of another, may be seen to be most common in Revelation and in order that the fact may be appreciated as essential to a proper interpretation of the prophecy, I cite a number of examples, moving rapidly through the book. In many cases the meaning is explained by John himself.

“The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven candlesticks are seven churches.” (1:20.) The Smyrna church is to have tribulation “ten days” (2:10), which can hardly be taken with mathematical exactness. “Satan’s throne,” is said to be in Pergamum, that is, some great evil was there. (2:13.) “The sword of my mouth,” a figure that occurs several times, means the truth of Christ. (2:16. Cf. 19:15, 21.) “Hidden manna” and “white stone” stand for salvation or spiritual fellowship with Christ. (2:17.) “The woman Jezebel” is spoken of as a member of the church in Thyatira (2:20); but certainly he does not mean that a woman by that name was there but that some person, perhaps a woman, was having an influence in the church to corrupt it, as Jezebel corrupted Israel of old. “Morning star” means honor or influence in the kingdom. (2:28.) “Garments” stands for lives. (3:4. Cf. 6:11; 7:13 f; 19:8; 22:14.) “Book of life” is the same as salvation. (3:5.) “Key of David” means the power of David, and David here is not David but David’s son, that is, the Son of God. (3:7.) “Crown” does not mean crown at all but Christian character. (3:11.) “Pillar in the temple of my God” means place of influence in the kingdom. (3:12.) Neither a literal pillar nor a literal temple is to be thought of. “Door” does not mean door but something spiritual analogous thereto. (3:20.) “Seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.” (4:5.) “A book written within and on the back, close sealed with seven seals,” stands for the secrets of future history which

Christ will disclose, who is represented both by the “lion that is of the tribe of Judah” and the “Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God.” (5:1, 5, 6.) “Bowls full of incense” are “the prayers of the Saints.” (5:8.) The angels, the living creatures and the elders are said to be in number “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands” (5:11); but it is a vision he is recounting, and he probably does not intend to be mathematically exact. To seal the “servants of God on their foreheads” is a figure of speech meaning salvation or divine approval. (7:3.) Then follows the statement that one hundred and forty and four thousand were sealed, twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes of Israel (7:4-8; 14:1), but we are not to understand that just this number from each tribe of Israel are saved. The robes of the saints are said to be made “white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14); but actual blood does not make garments white and “robes” here does not mean robes but souls, hearts, lives. “The Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd.” (7:17.) “Such men as have not the seal of God on their foreheads” are to be “tormented five months” (9:5, 10); but certainly “five months” does not mean that length of time. “Forty and two months” and “a thousand two hundred and threescore days” signify probably other lengths of time than what they specify. (11:2-3; 13:5.) If he had meant three and a half years he probably would have said so. The “two witnesses” that “shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth” are both “the two olive trees and the two candlesticks.” (11:4.) There is a “city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.” (11:8.) The city is called by two names, Sodom and Egypt, but he does not seem to mean Jerusalem, where the Lord was actually crucified; he does not seem to mean a city at all. “Three days and a half” (11:9, 11), does

not signify, it seems, that length of time. The “woman arrayed with the sun” is not Mary the mother of Jesus, but the kingdom of God or people of God. (12:1.) It is doubtful if anyone knows what “time, and times, and half a time” means, except that it is something other than what is said. (12:14.) It is hard to believe that the number “six hundred and sixty and six” means that many units. (13:18.)

“Women” stands for spiritual infidelity and “virgins” for saints, both men and women. (14:4.) “Babylon” may mean Rome but certainly not Babylon. (14:8; 16:19.) “Euphrates” signifies much more than that one river, if, indeed, it refers to the river by that name at all. (16:12.) “Har-Magedon,” I think, designates no battlefield but a spiritual conflict, “the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.” (16:14-16.) A “woman,” a “harlot,” is “Babylon.” (17:5.) “The seven heads are seven mountains.” (17:9.) “The ten horns that thou sawest are ten kings.” (17:12.) “One hour” hardly means so little time as it designates. (17:12.) “The waters which thou sawest, where the harlot sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.” (17:15.) “The fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.” (19:8.) “The bride, the wife of the Lamb” is “the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (21:9-10), whose “length and breadth and height are equal,” each dimension being “twelve thousand furlongs” or about fifteen hundred miles, (21:16); that is, he says that the bride of the lamb is a city and that this city is a cube, fifteen hundred miles long, fifteen hundred miles wide and fifteen hundred miles high. He certainly did not mean that his language should be understood literally. If he did, it is “some city” and “some bride” that he describes. “I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star.” (22:16.)

I think the point is now clear that very often in Revelation one thing is said and another is meant; or, to put it in another way, the Revelator as a rule expresses his thoughts in symbols, figures of

speech and pictures. Therefore, in any given case there is great probability that the language is not to be taken literally, but figuratively or symbolically, and that some statements or words may have no thought value or significance at all, but serve only to fill out the picture, as is the case often in the parables.

6. Now we must give a little attention to the question whether the writer of Revelation adopted or shared the Jewish expectation of a millennium. What this expectation was, and how it entered into Christian thought, has been well stated by Prof. David Smith. He says:

“The course of history was viewed as a succession of ‘ages,’ and the early Christian imagination, proceeding on the Jewish notion that the world was only some five thousand years old when the Savior came, saw in the story of Creation a program of the future and recognized six ages corresponding to the six days of creation. The first, according to St. Augustine, extended from Adam to the Flood, the second from Noah to Abraham, the third from Abraham to David, the fourth from David to the Babylonian Captivity, the fifth from the Captivity to the Savior’s Birth, and the sixth from the Savior’s Birth to the end of the world. And just as the six days of creation were succeeded by a Day of Rest, so the six ages will be followed by the Millennium, a thousand years of peace. By and by the idea arose that each of the past ages had lasted a thousand years; and hence it was reckoned that the year 1000 A.D., would terminate the current age and witness the Lord’s Advent and the Final Judgment.” (*Life and Letters of St. Paul*, pp. 153-154.)

That there was a Jewish expectation of a millennium of some kind and that it has had some influence upon Christian eschatology is freely admitted. But that this Jewish notion is found in New Testament literature is denied. This false idea, like many other false ideas, has come into Christian thought from Judaism, but does not

belong there. That the writers of the New Testament, and even Jesus himself, shared the Jewish belief that there would be on this earth a kingdom or civil government of righteousness and blessedness is a pure assumption. And to affirm that they expected it to last a thousand years, as did the Jews, is hardly proper respect for our intelligence. Do we not know that Jesus repudiated such an idea? Do we not know that he told those who expected such a thing of him that they could not be his followers? (Jno. 6:15, 26, 65.) Do we not know that he was a martyr to nonconformity to Jewish notions? Do we not know that Paul's life-long fight was against Jewish notions? That he saved Christianity from the ruin which the Jewish party in the first churches would have brought upon it? Did not Peter condemn all talk about a thousand years as idle garrulousness when he said that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day"? The idea of a civil government on earth for a thousand years is not found in a single utterance of Jesus, Paul or Peter; much less that Christ is going to "set it up" when he returns. Jesus, Peter and Paul taking up a Jewish idea that history has shown to be a vagary! Let infidels hawk all such wares and have the monopoly on all such commodities, which may have some sensational and commercial value but no spiritual value.

And we shall see that the apostle John also has not committed himself to this false and vain hope. In one passage he uses the expression, "a thousand years," but he uses it as he chooses to use it and means no such thing as the Jews and the premillennialists mean by the millennium. In fact, John tells us explicitly what he means by it. The apostle in the opening of his Gospel uses the word *logos* and applies it to Christ. Does he by the use of this word commit himself to the *logos* doctrine of Philo the Jew? We let infidels affirm that. We know he does no such thing. But this was a common Greek word that he laid hold of and made to do service for him, such as he

wanted done. So also, he commandeers the expression, “a thousand years,” and presses it into service. The apostle is not a dull mechanic joining words together by mechanical rules as some mechanical critics would have him do. He is a rhetorician. He is a master of words, doing execution with them, as Caesar did with soldiers. Words are things with life and breath when he arranges them in his phalanx. They have new life and new force when he commands them.

Let us now have the passage before us. I give it in the translation of the American Union Version. Read it over several times and think upon it carefully. Direct study of Scripture is essential, and it is usually the most profitable method. For some the book of Revelation is buried under the rubbish of commentaries.

“1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss, and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, 3 and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should lead the nations astray no more, until the thousand years should be finished; after this he must be loosed a little time. 4 And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them; and the souls of those that had been beheaded on account of the word of God, and whoever did not worship the beast, nor his image, and did not receive the mark on their forehead, and on their hand; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished. This is the first resurrection. 6 Happy and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no authority, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with him a thousand years. 7 And when the thousand years are finished, Satan will be loosed out of his prison, 8 and will go out to lead astray the nations that are in the

four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war, the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. 9 And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and encompassed the camp of the saints, and the beloved city; and fire came down out of heaven and devoured them. 10 And the Devil who led them astray was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

As to the passage, notice first how many symbols and figures of speech there are in it. I believe all will admit that all these are such: “Key of the abyss,” “great chain,” “laid hold of,” “dragon,” “serpent,” “bound,” “shut,” “sealed,” “loosed,” “thrones,” “beast,” “mark on their forehead and on their hand,” “priests,” “prison,” “four corners of the earth,” “Gog and Magog,” “war,” “camp of the saints,” “beloved city,” “lake of fire and brimstone.” If all these are figures of speech or symbols perhaps there are still more in the passage; in fact, there must of necessity be more.

Is there any certain starting point for us? Can we take the first step and be sure of our ground? Yes. We have a key to the front door. Let us open it; then, it may be, we can get further access to the house. The writer himself gives us the key.

Jesus explained two of the parables. (Matt. 13:18-23, 37-43.) We know how valuable these explanations are. They are suggestions for the interpretation of all the parable.

Throughout Revelation John also explains his language as we have seen. Consider well then the definite statement of the meaning of an imagery of the last verse of our passages, namely, “lake of fire.” He says: “This is the second death, the lake of fire.” (20:14.) A few verses ahead he makes the same explanation a second time, (21:8); and once before he had used the expression in the same sense. (2:11.) Of course, he does not mean that the lake of fire is

itself the second death, but that being cast into it is, or signifies, the second death. We have here a valuable key, and we have the right to use it for all it is worth. What now is the second death? It is eternal punishment to which the wicked and unbelieving are doomed. John says so.

If eternal punishment is the second death it follows naturally that in the conception of John, as well as according to Biblical history, the first death is the banishment and punishment that came upon the race on account of the first sin. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Gen. 2:17.) John chose not to consider in this connection physical death or else he counted it a part of the curse of the first death, which it is.

We are now in the vestibule of the house, so to speak. We entered by the front door. We had the right to do it. The builder himself, the Revelator, put the key in our hand. We did not enter by the back way nor by picking the lock nor by lifting a window. We did not use a skeleton key. We used the builder's own key, as he meant for us to do.

Can we now make further progress? Can we unlock the next door and pass into the hall? We can. If eternal punishment is the second death, eternal life, or salvation in heaven, would, by analogy, be the second life. But John does not use this expression. He uses, however, an expression corresponding to it but designating the experience that precedes it, namely, "the first resurrection" and tells us also what it means. He says in verse 5, explaining what he said in verse 4: "This is the first resurrection." Let us pay most earnest attention to this statement.

What does the pronoun "this" refer to or mean? Of course, it does not refer to the preceding part of verse 5, but to what is said in verse 4; and it is further explained by what is said in verse 6. The point that we are now dealing with is the crux of our whole problem.

What is “the first resurrection”? John tells us what it is. It is being upon “thrones” and exercising “judgment”; it is “living and reigning with Christ a thousand years.” He says so. Who is it that are on thrones and exercise judgment? The same persons that live and reign with Christ a thousand years. He says so. Who are these persons? Those that “had been beheaded (note the tense) on account of the testimony of Jesus, and on account of the word of God, and whoever did not worship the beast, nor his image, and did not receive the mark on their forehead, and on their hand.” Now that includes, not the martyrs only, but all the saved. John says so. Look at verse 6: “Happy and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no authority, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” That is, all those who have “part in the first resurrection” do not have “part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” John says so. Those who have part in the “first resurrection” are, therefore, the saved. It is the saved then who live and reign with Christ a thousand years. That is, “living and reigning with Christ a thousand years,” being on “thrones” and exercising “judgment,” being “priests of God and of Christ” and having “part in the first resurrection” are four vivid concrete expressions descriptive of salvation and of saved people. John says so. It matters not what a premillennialist, a postmillennialist, a Jew, an infidel or a Christian may say to the contrary. Believing Revelation to be an inspired writing I accept the author’s interpretation of his own language, and I would continue to accept it, though an angel from heaven should affirm the contrary, unless he should convince me that the book is a forgery. I vote for John’s angel as against any modern angel or modern man that would dare to contradict him. (Cf. 1:1.)

The idea that “the first resurrection” is the resurrection of the

bodies of the righteous dead, that is, their being clothed again in their bodies, from which they had been absent and which have remained in their graves or returned to dust, becomes, as an interpretation of the expression in this connection, ridiculous. I wonder how any Christian with insight into and reverence for the word of God can entertain it for a moment. Notice the language. He does not say that they were raised up *that* they ‘might live and reign with Christ, nor does he say the living and reigning with Christ *followed* their resurrection, but that *the living and reigning with Christ IS* “the first resurrection.” It is not said that it is the resurrection of the *body*; and this thought is absolutely excluded by the statement that “the souls of those that had been beheaded” constituted a part of those that “sat on thrones” and that “lived and reigned with Christ.” These martyrs in glory were living and reigning with Christ, while others on the earth before death, but at the same time, were living and reigning with him. This is what John says.

That “first” in “first resurrection” has reference to the order of world events, and means the bodily resurrection of the saints and that this is to be followed after a thousand years by the bodily resurrection of sinners is, therefore, an impossible rendering. To get all this out of the statement, “the rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished,” is guessing, not interpreting. The reading of the Old Version, “lived not again,” unfortunately gave this wrong suggestion. It designates the order of events in a believer’s experience. Regeneration is his first resurrection. Receiving a resurrection body is his second resurrection.

We have now unlocked the second door and entered the spacious hallway. Again, we used the key that the builder gave us. We had the right to use it. In fact, did we not do it we would show ourselves unworthy of inspecting his magnificent piece of workmanship.

Henceforth, we shall find no more locked doors. They are closed but they will open at our touch. The apostle knew what we would need to know in order to understand him and he gave us the information.

Notice how the conceptions of the four examples of concrete imagery, to which I have called attention, fit the conceptions of the Christian life that we often find in the New Testament, especially in the writings of John and Paul.

That the Christian life is a spiritual resurrection and that unsaved people are spiritually dead are common conceptions with Paul and John. (Cf. Col. 3:1; Rom. 6:4; Jno. 5:21, 24; 6:54; 10:10; 17:2, 3; 1 Jno. 5:13; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:1.) Those who hold to immersion only as baptism make the argument that baptism is a picture not only of our death to the old life of sin but also of our resurrection to the new life of righteousness, which we now experience. That is, baptism is a symbol of the first resurrection, of which we are now partakers. Jesus according to Matthew also used such imagery. (Matt. 8:22.)

That Christians sit upon thrones as Christ does, or that they reign as he does, is a common conception in the New Testament. Christ sits upon a spiritual throne and so do they. Christ reigns by moral and spiritual influence and so do they. This is not something that is yet to be. This has been going on since the death and exaltation of Christ which was his enthronement. Jesus himself originated both the thought and this use of the imagery, it seems. (Cf. Matt. 19:28.) As Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have prominence in the kingdom of God so do the apostles. In that sense they sit on thrones and reign. And in the same sense all Christians sit on thrones and reign. Paul the thirteenth apostle reigns as the others do. Jesus said to his disciples: "Ye are the salt of the earth." We all understand that statement. Well, that is reigning morally and spiritually. This kind of reigning will satisfy every Christian that is not ambitious and mean. Every moral and spiritual blessing that has come to the world in

nineteen centuries has come from Christ and his people. That is reigning. Every cleansing fire that has burnt out the impurities of society has come from Christ and his people. That is the dispensing of judgment. All seriously-minded and thoughtful people know that the only hope of the world is the gospel of Christ which his real followers, and they only, proclaim. That is world domination, the only kind that we as Christians should desire. So, Jesus says: "He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne." (Rev. 3:21.) It is in this book of Revelation that God's people are described as "a kingdom and priests." (5:10.) So also, in the passage we are dealing with it says: "They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him." (Cf. 1 Pet. 2:9.)

How Christians are priests we understand quite well. It means that every Christian has direct access to Christ and God. There is no intermediary or third party. It means that they are persons through whom God mediates to the world his salvation. When it is said that Christians are priests we do not think of robes and bells and candles and ceremonial performances. That is, evangelical Christians and most Protestants do not. Why do we not apply the same good sense to the Bible when it speaks of Christians on thrones and reigning? But many think immediately of literal thrones and golden crowns. The whole trouble is with our thinking. The temptation to idolatry is a mighty downward pull, strong and constant as the pull of gravity in the material world.

This literal king business is a condemned business, condemned both by God and by men. God never wanted a king in Israel, and he tolerated the institution of royalty as he tolerated divorce. He let the last king of Judah be dragged into captivity by a hook in his nose. The king business, like the priest business, belongs to the tutelage of the race. It is a thing of the past and not of the future. And yet many

associate the golden age of the world with actual kings and thrones and all the accompanying regalia and paraphernalia. They both belong to the childhood of the race, as stick horses and tin soldiers belong to the childhood of men.

Imagine me, for example, sitting on a literal throne somewhere, say, on the Mount of Olives. But every other Christian is sitting on a little throne, too. There would not be room enough on the Mount of Olives, nor in all Palestine, to plant our thrones. There we all sit with shining crowns, flourishing our golden scepters and not a subject to black our boots. I abdicate my throne right now.

Now examine the statements concerning Satan, his being bound a thousand years and cast into the abyss. (20:1-3.) What is the meaning?

Notice that we must regard this either as a complete or a partial depriving of Satan of his power. It must for two reasons be the latter.

The first reason is that the complete stripping of Satan of power follows in our text immediately after this limitation of his power. The severer judgment and punishment are described in verse 10. This binding of Satan was something less than a complete taking-away of his power.

The second reason is that Christ himself when he was on earth bound Satan. He said so. "How can one enter into the strong man's house, and seize on his goods," he asked, "unless he first bind the strong man? and then will he plunder his house." (Matt. 12:29.) The strong man is Satan. The stronger man, who binds him, is Jesus. This is what Jesus says. But Satan is not so bound as to have no power at all. It is a limiting of his power, a circumscribing of his influence and activities, that is meant. John saw that this limiting of Satan's power would continue for a "thousand years," when the "lid would be lifted," and Satan would again have liberty and power for

a “little time.” Some years ago, I thought out for myself this interpretation and the proof as just cited. I thought I could claim originality for it. But to my chagrin I discovered the other day that Augustine made the same interpretation supported by the same words of Jesus. (*City of God*, 20, 7.) I cannot, therefore, claim originality for the interpretation, but there is the more assurance that it is sound.

That Satan’s power is greatly limited in the Christian age but not wholly destroyed is certainly the fact. Consider that Jesus said, as he approached his death on the cross: “Now is the prince of this world cast out.” (Jno. 12:31. Cf. 16:11.) But he did not cast him out in every sense, for he said afterward: “The prince of the world cometh: and hath nothing in me.” (Jno. 14:30.) Here are conceptions of the limiting of Satan or the casting out of Satan, that should guide us in interpreting Rev. 20:1-3. There ought to be no doubt at all as to the soundness and safety of this method of procedure.

If now we have reasoned correctly up to this point, it is easy to say what “the thousand years” signifies. It is the Christian age extending to “a little time” before Christ comes again. “The thousand years” have become nearly two thousand years. Or are we now in the “little time” that follows that period? I do not know. But this is certain:

We are either in the millennium or have passed through it, and have entered into the “little time,” when from all quarters attacks are made on the very citadel of Christianity itself.

It may be that such a time is now in the beginning. How long it will last, I know not. It is a “little time.” It is my opinion that all premillennialists and many postmillennialists have worked the idea of the millennium into something far afield from what John had in mind when he used the expression, “a thousand years.”

Why did John use the expression “a thousand years”? Why does

he keep us guessing as to such important events? I am convinced that he intended to keep us guessing, and that he has succeeded splendidly.

There are yet other parts of this remarkable specimen of literary architecture, that we have not inspected; but, if one admits the principles which we have developed, he now has the proper angle from which to view them and can proceed without further help. If he does not admit these principles, further discussion would not help him. He that wills to be ignorant will be ignorant.