

Sailing With Paul

H.A. Ironside

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Introduction

There are many lessons to be learned from a careful study of Luke's account of Paul's voyage to Rome. Taken literally, it shows us, in a wonderful way, the personal care of the Lord Jesus Christ for His beloved servant in a time of great stress and difficulty. The particular incident recorded in Acts 27:21-26 is that to which I especially desire to draw each reader's attention.

For long, weary days and nights neither sun nor stars had been visible. The captain of the ship was in despair; the mariners, hopeless. Then it was that Paul, "the prisoner of the Lord" (Ephesians 4:1)—how lovely a title: not a prisoner of Caesar, nor of Rome, but of the Lord!—became the comforter of all in the ship, comforting them with the comfort wherewith he had just been comforted of God. For to him an angel of the Lord had appeared, standing by him, and saying, "Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee."

This settled it for Paul. He knew that not a man on that ship would be lost, whatever might become of the vessel itself. So he says, "Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: *for I believe God*, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island." And so it was, for the ship was wrecked; but every one who had sailed with Paul was saved from drowning and reached the shore alive.

Now, I want to apply this in a spiritual way. First, I would earnestly ask each reader: Do you sail with Paul? It is not now a question of temporal, but of eternal, salvation. The voyage I have in mind is not from one earthly port to

another, but that vastly more important voyage from earth to heaven, from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. One thing is certain: you are on a voyage, sailing over the sea of time, bound for eternity. Do you then sail with Paul? All who do shall reach the port of endless glory at last, whatever circumstances they may pass through on the voyage. All who do not sail with the great apostle will fail of final salvation.

What is it to sail with Paul? It is to know Paul's Saviour and to share Paul's blessings. Are these things true of you? There are untold thousands in Christendom today who are nominally believers, who belong to the Church in its outward aspect, who partake of the sacraments and are more or less zealous in what is called "Christian work," but who do not sail with Paul. He repudiated all such things as a ground of confidence and trusted alone in the matchless grace of God.

What does grace mean to you, my reader? People talk of grace and sing of being "saved by grace," who are all the time trusting in their own righteousness and building their hopes for eternity on their own zeal and earnestness. They never seem to consider the meaning of grace; otherwise they would not use the word with their lips and by their actions deny it.

Grace is the very opposite of merit. If I think of *merit*, I see only an eternal hell of woe before my guilty soul because of my sin (Romans 6:23). But when I think of *grace*, I turn from all thoughts of what I deserve and contemplate the matchless love of God which caused Him, the offended One, to give His only begotten Son to die for me, the offender, that, confiding in Him, I might be eternally saved. Thus I see that grace is not only undeserved favor, but it is favor shown to one who has deserved the very opposite. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9)—this is Paul's own statement of salvation by grace. It was thus he was saved, and in the same way are they all who sail with Paul.

It is my purpose in this pamphlet to trace out some of

the precious truths Paul was chosen to make known for our eternal blessing. Only let each reader be sure he or she is one who sails with Paul, for to none other do they apply.

Conversion To God

The one who sails with Paul has been truly and definitely converted to God. Paul's conversion occupies a larger place in the New Testament than any particular doctrine that Paul preached. About this, God would have no uncertainty. He let us know clearly how Paul began the voyage to an eternity of bliss.

Three full chapters in the Acts are devoted to this important subject. In chapter 9 we have Luke's historical account of this model conversion. In chapter 22 Paul himself gives what has been called the "Hebrew narrative" of this blessed event; he relates his conversion to Jewish auditors in a manner especially calculated to appeal to them. In chapter 26 we have his "Gentile narrative," where, "being made all things to all men" (1 Corinthians 9:22), he again tells of his conversion, but in such style as to be clear to Agrippa the Edomite and Festus the Roman.

Then in the first chapter of his letter to the Galatians, Paul once more dwells on this wonderful theme, particularly emphasizing the sovereignty of God in it all (verses 15,16). Philippians 3 is a fifth account, where his special object is to disclaim all human merit. And he once more refers to it in 1 Timothy 1:12-17, where he declares that in him as chief of sinners, Christ Jesus had shown all longsuffering, "for a pattern [or model] to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting."

With such an array of Scripture before us, which I hope each reader will carefully read, it is surely manifest that *no one sails with Paul who did not begin with conversion.*

I know it is unpopular to press this in some places

today. "Don't trouble people about the how, where or when of conversion. The only thing of importance is to determine how they stand now." Such is the unscriptural and misleading instruction often given. And because of this, souls are harmed by an easy-going ministry that does not arouse the conscience, which lets people complacently drift on to a lost eternity who are not sailing with Paul, though they think all is well. The words of the Lord Jesus may surely rebuke all such folly: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

Conversion then is a very real experience and not something that may take place unconsciously. I do not mean by this that all know the day, the hour, and the moment, when they were converted. Paul did, undoubtedly; but often young people go through a prolonged period of exercise, in which, little by little, they learn the folly of self-confidence and the simplicity of faith in Christ alone for salvation. When He is trusted in, conversion has taken place; but, for lack of sound teaching, many do not realize this, and so have more or less perplexity in answering the questions, "When, or where, were you converted?"

But there should certainly be no difficulty in regard to the *how*. All people are converted in exactly the same way, however experiences may vary. Conversion is a turning from self to Christ; it is ceasing to rely on one's own fancied merits and trusting in the Lord Jesus alone. Has this great change occurred in your life, my reader? If so, you have been converted and are sailing with Paul.

Let no doubts or fears distress your soul if you do not seem to see things just as others do. Do not allow Satan to torment you with thoughts of your unworthiness, or questions as to whether your faith is of the right kind. It has never been God's way to put all souls through some stereotyped experience. No two Bible conversions are alike as to the means of awakening or the way in which the soul was led to trust in Christ. And, on the other hand, it is important to remember that if you *were* worthy, you would not need a Saviour. It is because of your *unworthiness*

you came to Him, the worthy One. Let your soul then be occupied with Him, and not with your own frames and feelings.

And as to “the right kind of faith”—a difficulty felt by vast numbers of young believers—remember it is not the right faith that saves, but faith in the right Person. You might have the strongest possible faith in yourself, in the priest, in the church, in the sacraments, in visions or dreams, and be lost forever. But, on the other hand, the feeblest faith in Christ Jesus, God’s Lamb, saves for all eternity, and puts you forever in Paul’s company.

In each account given of his conversion we see how God showed him the futility of self-righteousness and human religiousness as a means of salvation, and the absolute certainty of eternal salvation when the Lord Jesus is trusted in and confessed. When He becomes the soul’s object, conversion is an accomplished fact.

So when we ask, “How, when, or where, were you converted?” we really mean, “How were you led to trust in Christ? When did you find out that He *alone* must be your Saviour? Where did you get that sweet rest in Him?”

And if, perchance, your exercises covered a number of weeks or months, out of which you emerged at last resting on His mighty arm and trusting His finished work, do not be distressed that you cannot particularize, but boldly confess Him as Saviour and own Him as Lord. All who have turned from self to Christ are in the fullest, clearest, scriptural sense *converted*.

You may be troubled and perplexed about many things; your knowledge of many subjects may be very vague; your conflicts with yourself may be most trying, and at times thoroughly discouraging; but let nothing make you doubt that you are converted and therefore eternally saved, if Christ is the One to whom you have turned for deliverance. Count on God to make all else clear as you go on, and fear not as to the final issue; for all who sail with Paul shall come out right in the end. The devil knows this, and therefore seeks to rob you of the good of it; but it is written, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

Forgiveness of Sins

No unforgiven soul sails with Paul: which is to say that Scripture recognizes no such person as a believer in Christ Jesus who has not already received forgiveness of all his sins. "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7). And the beloved apostle John joins with his brother-messenger Paul and says, when addressing the entire family of God: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake" (1 John 2:12). Now faith lays hold of this and cries, "I believe God!"

Some time ago a young man called on me. I asked him if he were a Christian. "Yes," was the reply. "At some special meetings held recently I trusted Christ and am now seeking to serve Him."

"Indeed," I said, "this is very good news. Then you know what it is to have all your sins forgiven!"

"Oh no, sir!" he cried, "I would not dare say that. I have been converted but a few weeks, and do not feel that I have forgiveness yet. But I am hoping to reach it soon."

"And how do you expect to know when you have attained it?"

"Well, sir, I am not quite clear as to that, but the Bible says something about the Spirit's witness to let us know, and I have not got the witness yet, though I am seeking it every day."

"If you have really trusted Christ as your Saviour, as the One who died for you, you already have the witness," I answered.

He looked at me in perplexity, and then said, "I do not understand you. I do not want to doubt God, but I cannot feel the witness at all."

I pointed out that the word *feel* is only once found in the New Testament, and that is in Acts 17:27, where Paul says of the Gentiles that "they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find Him." The

word *feeling* is found but twice, once in Ephesians 4:19, where the ungodly Gentiles are said to be “past feeling.” The word does not belong to the Christian, you see, but to the heathen who have no written revelation. Our word is “faith,” or, “believe.” We do not know because we *feel*; but we *believe* God’s Word, and thus we know.

The young man became deeply interested and it was my privilege then to put before him a line of truth I would now endeavor to simply unfold to you. Through it he was soon rejoicing in the knowledge of forgiveness, and I trust the same result might follow if these lines are read by any doubting one.

We read in Scripture of the witness of the Spirit *to us*, and the witness *in us*. Until we receive the witness *to us*, we cannot have the witness *in us*. This is of supreme importance, and, I hope, will be carefully noted.

Open your Bible to Hebrews 10. In the first fourteen verses there is a vivid contrast presented between the temporary and oft-repeated sacrifices under the law, and the one all-sufficient offering of our Lord Jesus Christ, which needs never to be repeated, because full atonement for the sins of every believer has been perfectly accomplished. On the basis of this, it can finally be said that the worshippers, once purged, have no more conscience of sins (compare with Hebrews 10:2) Christ has now sat down on the right hand of God, because His work is finished. Nothing remains to be done. “By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (verse 14). That is, He saves forever and completely all who are set apart to God through His blood, by personal faith in Him who shed it.

Now see what glorious results flow from this: “Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us” (verse 15)—the work of Christ being all complete, the Holy Spirit witnesses to what? and where is the witness found?

First, He witnesses to new birth: “I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them” (verse 16). There is thus a new nature, with new desires and yearnings, implanted in every believer. Nor is this all. He further witnesses: “Their sins and iniquities will I

remember no more” (verse 17). Thus there is the Spirit’s testimony to full forgiveness.

Secondly: This witness-record, or testimony, is found in the Holy Scriptures, written by the Spirit’s dictation. The witness of the Spirit is the testimony of the Holy Ghost *in the Word of God*. Have you believed it? If so, you *know*, because God says it, that your sins are forgiven if you have trusted Christ.

But what about the witness *in us*? We have the witness in us when we believe the witness *to us*. We have then received the Word into our hearts—and, remember, *the Word is the witness*.

Now read 1 John 5:1-13. Weigh every word, but note especially verse 10: “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.” Compare this with verse 11: “And this is the record [or witness], that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.” This is the unvarying testimony of Scripture. The Spirit’s witness is not a happy feeling in my heart. It is *the record of the Word of God as to the work of Christ and its results*.

When I believe this, the witness is received into my very being, and henceforth “the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16). In other words, God’s testimony, ministered to my soul in the Spirit’s power, and my personal faith in that Word, are in agreement. I know I am God’s child, and all God’s children are forgiven. So I know that my sins are forgiven also.

In a later chapter I hope to say something on another aspect of forgiveness—that which the child of God needs when he fails; but the forgiveness we have had before us is the eternal portion of all who have rested their souls on Christ.

Justification From All Things

Of the treasure committed to Paul, the blessedness of which God would have all who sail with him enjoy while upon their voyage, no truth is of more importance to the peace of the believer than that of justification. This is preeminently what Paul calls “my gospel,” and “my doctrine.” It will be observed by the thoughtful reader of the Word of God that while the question, “How can man be just (or, justified) with God?” was twice asked in the book of Job, and to Habakkuk it was revealed that “The just shall live by faith;” it remained for the apostle of the Gentiles to fully develop and widely proclaim the great doctrine of justification by faith. It is the cornerstone of “the mystery of the gospel” (Ephesians 6:19). No other apostle or apostolic writer so much as mentions it, save that Luke as the inspired historian tells us how Paul preached it. But Peter and John never get beyond forgiveness of sins—nor, in one sense, shall any of us; for our song in heaven shall be of divine forgiveness. Still there is an aspect of forgiveness far higher than that of mere pardon, and it is of this that Paul delighted to treat.

To unfold his special instruction on this soul-stirring theme would be to expound the first eight chapters of the epistle to the Romans, which has most appropriately been called “The epistle of the Forum, or the Law Court.” I simply desire, as briefly and clearly as possible, to outline the subject of justification as treated in Romans and defended in Galatians.

When I think of *forgiveness*, as the word is ordinarily used, I think of a man proven to be guilty but pardoned through the clemency of another. But when I think of *justification*, I think of a man charged with guilt, but, upon being brought into court, cleared on every count. And this is exactly what scriptural justification means. It is “the sentence of the judge in favor of the prisoner.” And yet

it is the ungodly who are justified by a holy God on the principle of absolute righteousness. How can such an event be brought about?

In the first recorded sermon by the apostle Paul he tells us in what name it is done. He strikes the key note of the theme so fully developed in the Roman epistle: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man [Christ Jesus] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38,39). Moses' law indeed could only condemn. Through the name of Jesus, God can proclaim justification for every believer. Why? For the simplest of all possible reasons. The Lord Jesus Himself had taken the place of the guilty, borne the judgment due to sin, and having fully glorified God in this respect had been raised from the dead and seated in highest glory as Man, in token of God's full satisfaction in His finished work. He "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 4:25; 5:1). It is the very simplicity of it over which men stumble. That He, the Holy One, should have been made a sin offering that we might become the righteousness of God in Him, is something mere human reason would never have conceived. Yet this is the very core and essence of the gospel.

If sin be high treason against the Majesty in the heavens—and it is—Christ has died in the traitor's stead. If sin be a capital crime against the moral government of God—and it is—Christ has borne the full punishment deserved by the offender. If sin be a debt which man could never meet—and it is—Christ has paid every last cent, and the debtor may now go free.

Look at it in what aspect you may, and you will find the Word of God reveals that all that He had against the sinner was more than met in the Cross of Christ. Thus God can now be "Just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

Sin is not merely pardoned—it is atoned for. Guilt is not simply overlooked—it is gone forever from the eye of God in the cross of His Son. Iniquity is not only forgiven—it is purged by the blood of the Son of the Highest, and the transgressor is justified from all things.

It is after fully establishing all of this that the apostle triumphantly asks: “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Romans 8:33,34).

All the value of the finished work of Christ—ever before God—stands over against all that I was as a one-time sinful, guilty man. This is justification, and this is my standing in the presence of the infinitely Holy and Righteous One.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). And the reason is that He Himself took the condemnation, endured the wrath of God, and has made full satisfaction for all the believer’s sins. Faith rests on this and fears no more.

Regeneration

God not only clears the believer from every charge, forgiving his sins and justifying him from all things, but He also makes him a new creature, giving him a new nature and introducing him into a new creation of which the risen Christ is Head. All this and more is involved in the truth of regeneration, a truth of great practical importance, though the word itself occurs but once in Paul’s epistles, and only twice in all the Bible.

The two passages are Matthew 19:28 and Titus 3:5. It is with the latter that we are now especially concerned, as being part of “Paul’s doctrine,” which we are seeking to apprehend. But a glance at the former verse will aid us greatly in understanding the other. The Greek word

translated *regeneration* does not exactly mean to be generated anew, or reborn, as we might suppose; so it is not really synonymous with new birth. It rather means the bringing in of a new order. In Matthew the Lord uses it as referring to “the world to come;” that is, the millennium. Those who had followed Him in His humiliation would share His glory in the coming kingdom—the regeneration, or bringing in of the new order long predicted by the prophets and for which Israel is still waiting and sighing.

But already a new order has been established, which we generally call Christianity. To share in this we need the washing of the Word, the bath of regeneration. In other words, when a man believes the gospel and thus receives God’s present testimony into his soul it washes and cleanses him; he is born anew and thus made morally fit for the new order into which he is brought by the matchless grace of God.

Paul never speaks of being born again, though he uses other terms that mean practically the same thing. He looks at man as dead and needing life, so he says to believers, “When we were dead in sins, [God] hath quickened us together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5). We have become sharers of Christ’s life; hence we are born from above. And now we belong to the new creation of which Christ is the Head.

Our link with the old creation is severed through Christ’s death; for He died as representing us, and faith links us up with Him as risen. We belong to the regeneration, the new race, and no longer are part of the old generation of which fallen Adam is head.

It is a great step forward in the experience of one’s own soul when this stupendous truth is apprehended “for the obedience of faith” (Romans 16:26).

Henceforth the Christian will test everything by its relation to Christ and the new position which all who are in Him now occupy. The practical effect of this will be very far-reaching. The old legal ground of “Is there any harm in this or that?” and “Is it my duty to do thus and so?” will be left behind. In its stead, the believer will be able to view

everything from the standpoint of privilege and loyalty to the Head. In place of speaking of “any harm,” or “no harm,” the question will be, “Is this consistent with new creation?” Tests will come daily, and can all be met on this ground: “Is it of Adam or of Christ? Will this enable me to better reflect Christ? Will that be suited to the new order to which I have come?” In other words, “Is it of the old generation, or of the regeneration?”

Sometimes there may be perplexity still, but if no doubtful step is taken and God’s mind is sought through His Word, the Holy Spirit—who is the power of the new order—can be counted on to make all clear. What is needed is a single eye; for, “If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light” (Matthew 6:22).

The washing, or bath, of regeneration is that one bathing referred to by our Lord when He said, “He that is washed [or, bathed] needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit” (John 13:10). This bath is the application of the Word of God (see John 15:3; 1 Peter 1:23) to heart and conscience when one is born anew. A double cleansing is thus effected. The Word tells of the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, which cleanseth from all—or every—sin. This is judicial. It purges my conscience, and renders me forever clean before God. But the same Word judges all my old ways, and judges me personally as morally unfit for God. When I bow to this testimony in repentance, I am morally washed all over. And thus I am, by this double cleansing, introduced into the new order. Hence it is called “the washing of regeneration” (Titus 3:5). It needs never to be repeated. Once in the new creation, I am in Christ, and can never again be separated from Him.

But now I need the daily application of the Word to keep me clean, to keep my ways in accord with the order to which I belong. “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word” (Psalm 119:9). This is that daily washing of the feet which the Lord illustrates so beautifully in John 13. And this blessed service He is continually carrying on, that we may

enjoy and have part with Him in the things so dear to His heart.

See to it, young Christian, that you do not hinder this loving service by neglect of your Bible, by a prayerless spirit, and by unjudged evil in your life. You belong to the regeneration. Make it ever your object to act accordingly, cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart.

Eternal Life

Of those who in this spiritual sense sailed with Paul, no one was dearer to him than the young preacher Timothy; and to him he writes, "Lay hold on eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:12). The inspired exhortation is for us likewise; but if we would lay hold on life eternal, it is important that we understand the teaching of Scripture regarding it.

John is, properly speaking, the apostle of eternal life. He it is who fully unfolds it; but it is Paul who ever presses it as a practical thing.

The Gospel of John presents the Lord Jesus as the Eternal Life which was with the Father, and was manifested here for a time on earth. The first Epistle of John presents that same life now manifested in the children of God. In both Gospel and Epistle, again and again it is insisted upon that this everlasting life is the present portion of all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. He gives eternal life to all His sheep, and assures us that they shall never perish. Indeed, they could not, or the life would not be eternal, but simply probationary.

Let there be any doubt or difficulty as to this in the Christian's mind, and there can scarcely be true, unselfish service for the Lord Jesus Christ. If I have any lingering fear of possibly being lost at last, or if I suppose that I maintain my salvation by my faithfulness, genuine faithfulness there cannot be, for I shall ever have before me not purely the

glory of Christ but the selfish thought of making my own soul secure.

But all this is rebuked wherever life eternal is taught in Scripture. In the very nature of things a life that is eternal cannot come to an end. And every believer has this life—a life that has no beginning and shall have no ending; for it is the very life of the Son of God. In the Christian it has a beginning, it is true. It is imparted to him the moment he is born of God. By human generation he obtained natural life—a life that was already forfeited. By new birth—divine generation—he becomes the possessor of eternal, inalienable, non-forfeitable life.

It is thus we are enabled to apprehend divine things and have fellowship with divine persons. “This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

But in addition to the doctrine of the present possession of eternal life, the Word of God presents that life as a goal and as an experience subjectively apprehended and enjoyed. This is Paul’s special line. He who reads only Paul on this subject might lose sight of the truth we have just been considering, but there is no need so to do. John’s truth comes first; then that committed to Paul follows. Eternal life is ours now, but it is also our hope. “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world [or, the ages] began” (Titus 1:2).

This is the Christian’s goal. He now has eternal life in him. He looks on with eager, glad expectancy to the time when, in the fullest possible sense, he will enter into life, and will be in the scene to which eternal life belongs. Now he has eternal life in a decaying body and in a crumbling scene. Then he will possess a body radiant with eternal life, and fully fitted for its display in a “city that hath foundations,” and amid scenes that “cannot be shaken” (Hebrews 11:10; 12:27).

Take a simple illustration: A child possesses life—natural life—from the moment of birth. But for that child there is a long period of discipline and education before he really enters into life, fulfilling his chosen vocation.

So with the believer. From the moment of new birth he has eternal life, and yet he daily lives in hope of eternal life, and when at last earth's discipline is over and the soul's education complete, he goes away "into life eternal" (Matthew 25:46).

But Paul's exhortation to Timothy suggests a third application. He is to "lay hold on eternal life." In 1 Timothy 6:17-19 the "rich in this world" are charged "that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life;" or, as a better rendering has it, "lay hold on the true life," or, "life in reality." The original Greek is quite distinct from the ordinary term for eternal life.

But the one passage throws a clear light upon the other. We lay hold on eternal life as we realize in our souls that we do not belong to this sphere; that everything for us is connected with the scene to which we are going. Hence we learn to look very differently upon the things of this life from what we once did. We realize that the true life is life in fellowship with God, and so we are enabled, in the Spirit's power, to use this world without abusing it: walking as Christ walked, who alone fully manifested eternal life in this scene of death. This, for us, is to lay hold on eternal life.

It is most sorrowful to hear people glibly talking of having eternal life and being forever saved, when they are really trying to "make the best of this life" like men of the world who make no profession. If I have eternal life, I am to make it known by living it out, and acting now in the light of the coming day of the unveiling of Jesus Christ.

This was what Paul desired for Timothy, and what he would see in all who sail with the beloved apostle, whose whole life-purpose was expressed in these words: "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but

dung, that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3:7,8). This is to display eternal life in a body of clay, an earthen vessel, while pressing on to the scene to which that life belongs.

Sanctification

None who sail with Paul need be confused as to the teaching of Scripture on sanctification if they will but carefully weigh the many luminous passages in his epistles on the subject.

It should be plain to any thoughtful person that the great apostle of the Church never divides believers into two classes, some of whom are “only justified” and the others possessing a “second blessing,” or sanctified. On the contrary, he addresses all Christians as “sanctified in Christ Jesus.” Nor does this mean that they are morally perfect, or sinless. Surely no one could so speak of the Corinthian assembly. All kinds of evils had to be corrected among them. They are called “carnal” in chapter 3 of the first epistle: yet he addresses them as “sanctified” in the second verse of chapter 1, and in verse 30 he writes: “Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us ... sanctification.” They were in Christ, so they were sanctified though their ways were far from being all that God would have them to be.

There need be no difficulty here if it be known and held in mind that sanctification means “separation to God.” All believers have been set apart to God in Christ, and are no longer of the world even as He is not of the world.

In harmony with other New Testament writers Paul presents sanctification as three-fold:

1. We are sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:16; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13).

2. We are sanctified by the blood of Christ, and His one all-sufficient offering upon the cross (Hebrews 2:10,11; 9:11-14; 10:10,14; 13:12).

3. We are sanctified by the Word of God (Ephesians 5:25,26). Compare this with the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in John 17:17-19.

The sanctification by the Holy Spirit is the beginning of the work of God in one's soul, separating him from the world and follies he once loved, turning his heart to God, exercising him about his sinfulness, and leading him to personal faith in Christ. To this agree the words of the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 1:2. Sanctification of the Spirit is there shown to be the divine means used to lead the guilty soul to the blood of sprinkling. Having trusted in the work of Christ, the Spirit dwells personally in the believer and it is His blessed work to lead the soul on in the ways of Christ.

Sanctification by the blood, or the one offering of the Son of God, is *positional*. That is, it has to do with the new position into which the saved one is brought. His sins are purged, his conscience is free, and he stands before God in all the value of the work of His Son. Thus he is forever perfected as to his conscience, and set apart from a world that lies in the wicked one, under the judgment of God. The believer can never again become part of that world. The work of Christ has come in between his soul and the judgment his sins deserved. Thus in the fullest possible sense he is sanctified by the blood of the everlasting covenant. If the profession be unreal (as contemplated in Hebrews 10:29), there is, of course, no abiding sanctification; but where faith is genuine he is sanctified eternally (note verse 14 of the same chapter).

Sanctification by the Word of God is the *practical* outcome of the work of Christ and the Spirit's work within. Daily the Word is applied to heart and conscience by the Lord Himself. He keeps the feet of His saints, cleansing them from defilement contracted while passing through this polluted scene, with the washing of water by the Word. In this sense no saint is "wholly sanctified" until he no longer needs the Word of God for cleansing and instruction. That will only be at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we get it in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. Then shall every Christian

be presented blameless, his sanctification completed, and nothing for all eternity shall be permitted to come up that will again defile his feet or call for the application of the Word in cleansing.

There is a passage that is often greatly misunderstood, in Hebrews 12:14: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness [or sanctification], without which no man shall see the Lord." Observe that in this solemn and important verse "holiness," like "peace with all men," is put as the object before the soul. But no one should presume to say he has attained what he is distinctly directed to follow. Paul's own experience, as described in Philippians 3:12-14, might well rebuke such a thought. He says, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Such may well be the settled purpose of each young Christian reading these lines. You have been called unto holiness, and holiness is simply Christ-likeness. If He be ever before you, and you daily seek to walk as He walked in the Spirit's power, guided by the unerring Word of God, you shall know the blessedness of being sanctified by the truth. And if the great adversary of your soul taunts you with failure and weakness, look not in or around you, but up into the face of Christ Jesus, exalted in glory, and cry in faith, "He is my sanctification. I am in Him, and that forever!"

Acceptance

It is a precious truth that God accepts every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, not according to any real or fancied

goodness in himself but according to the Father's estimate of His beloved Son.

I remember well a striking illustration of the power of this in practical life, which I saw several years ago. A dear woman, who had herself known the Lord from her girlhood but had erred in marrying an unsaved man, asked the prayers of a little company of Christians one night for her husband who had become a depraved drunkard and gambler. In wondrous mercy, while we prayed, God heard and answered; for into our meeting came Alex Beck himself and cried, "Friends, I want to find my wife's God! I was gambling and drinking in a saloon near here and twenty minutes ago it seemed to me a voice cried in my soul, 'Alex Beck, you must be saved tonight or be damned forever!' I threw down the cards in fear and rose from the chair and fled from the place. Tell me how I may be saved!" It was a solemn moment for us all, thus to see God's power so manifest. We pointed the anxious, trembling man to the Cross, and, perhaps an hour later, he was rejoicing in God's salvation and husband and wife were one in Christ.

A few evenings afterward I heard him give his first public testimony. These were substantially his words: "My friends, I want you all to look at me. I know I ain't a pretty sight to look on. I'm just a great big, ugly man, but in God's sight I'm altogether lovely, for I'm all dressed up in Jesus!"

He had been truly taught of the Spirit. For this is none other than Paul's doctrine of acceptance—"He hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). Once, all our guilt and sin were imputed to Jesus when He hung upon the cross as our Substitute. Now we appear before God's face in all His perfections. "[God] hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Carefully observe, it is not, as theologians sometimes put it, that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us. Scripture never so speaks. It is this, that God reckons us, looks upon us, as righteous, because of the work His Son has accomplished

and of the new place in which we now stand before Him; that is, in Christ, perfect and complete in God's sight.

Being so accepted, we are as dear to God as is our blessed Lord Himself, who, when He prayed to the Father said, "I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast *loved* them, as *Thou hast loved Me*" (John 17:23). Could language be clearer, or words stronger, to declare the unbounded love of the Father for all who are accepted in His Son? Well may the happy Christian sing:

"So dear, so very dear to God,

I could not dearer be;

The love wherewith He loves His Son,

Such is His love to me."

And being thus brought so near to God in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, our security naturally follows. We are in Him, and, consequently, are as safe from judgment as He is. He died in our stead, and faith reckons His death as our death. Now He lives forever beyond the reach of death and judgment. And in Him we are accepted! If He falls (far be the thought!) then we also fall; but He has said, "Because I live ye shall live also" (John 14:19). We have died out of the old relationship, in which we had part by nature, but we have now been raised with Christ and our life is hid with Christ in God. Ponder carefully Colossians 3:1-4.

Already God sees us as a heavenly company, for Christ is in glory as our representative. So we are told: "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:4-7). Thus our destiny is forever settled. Our past, present, and future we know on the authority of God's Word. Once dead in sins, we are now seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and for all

eternity to be to the praise of His glory as an exhibit of the power of His grace!

And it is well to remember that a true Christian life springs from a recognition of our acceptance. So the apostle adds: "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). He who has been thus taken into favor in the Beloved is called to show by a holy, blameless life his appreciation of the grace bestowed upon him, and to manifest Christ in his walk and conversation.

The same truth is put before us in the chapter already noticed in Colossians. He whose life is hid with Christ in God is called upon to put off all that belonged to him as a man in the flesh, and to put on the new ways of the man in Christ.

But let it never be forgotten that no merit attaches to the believer because of his godliness and devotedness. He needs none. He is already accepted in the Beloved, and nothing can be added to this. No loving obedience he can render can make him one whit dearer to the heart of God.

But it should now be the object of his life to be well-pleasing to Him in whom he is accepted. This is what Paul means when he writes: "We labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him" (2 Corinthians 5:9).

All believers are accepted in Him, and this for eternity. Henceforth it should be the object of our souls to so live that we may daily be accepted of Him, or well-pleasing to Him. This is to walk worthy of our high and holy calling.

Standing and State

No believer is likely to be clear on other lines whose mind is in confusion as to the Scriptural distinction between *standing* and *state*. If those who sail with Paul would but carefully consult his inspired letters on this, as

on all other subjects, they would see that the two terms are very different in their application.

Standing refers to our ability to appear before God uncondemned; state has to do with our actual condition of soul. Standing speaks of privilege, and contemplates what God, in His rich grace, has done for each believer. State is the measure in which one answers to this in his own experience. Standing is eternal and unchangeable. State is variable and depends on how one goes on with God.

Paul is not the first or only Biblical writer to use the term standing. Several examples from other Scriptures may help to make clear its application. "The ungodly shall not *stand* in the judgment" (Psalm 1:5). "The foolish shall not *stand* in Thy sight" (Psalm 5:5). "They told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would *stand*" (Esther 3:4). "The great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to *stand*?" (Revelation 6:17). To these one might add many more, but enough are before us to show how the word is used. To stand is practically synonymous with the ability to face the throne of judgment. Now compare with these verses Romans 5:1,2: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into *this grace wherein we stand*, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Note also 1 Corinthians 15:1: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and *wherein ye stand*."

The wicked cannot stand, but every believer has a standing that is unassailable. What is the ground of this standing? Is it his good experience, his enjoyment of divine things, his energy in service, his happy state? Not at all! He stands in grace—the grace revealed in the gospel.

Our standing then is a most comprehensive term, embracing all that God has done for us in the work of His Son. In previous chapters we have considered our forgiveness, our justification, our positional sanctification, our acceptance in Christ: all these blessings are connected with our standing. We cannot add to, nor take away from, what God has made us in Christ. Consequently we have for

eternity a perfect and unassailable standing before God. Worlds may be wrecked and the heavens pass away, but the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ stands in absolute security, free of all condemnation.

Is this then to say that each believer's state of soul is all that it could be? Far from it. If it were, where would be the need for all the exhortations to godly living found in the epistles and other parts of the Word of God? Observe, for instance, the anxiety of the apostle that the state of his beloved Philippians might in measure answer to their standing.

He had no question whatever as to their standing. That, he knew, could never be altered. So he tells them he is confident that He who hath begun a good work in them will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6). But he hoped to send Timothy unto them that he (Paul) might be of good comfort when he knew their *state*. Not all professed laborers in word and doctrine would naturally care for their *state*, but he knew this pastoral concern was characteristic of Timothy (Philippians 2:19,20).

Were Paul and Timothy concerned as to whether these saints were "keeping saved," to use an expression common among some who are untaught today? No, indeed. They knew God had settled forever the question of their salvation. But they desired to see fruit for God manifested in the lives of the saints. They wished to have them going on happily together as a company of redeemed ones should. And this is what *state* has reference to. It is experience; but experience and standing are two very different things. When God addresses believers as "saints," that is, separated or holy ones, he is speaking of their standing. When He exhorts them to be holy, even as he is holy, He refers to the state of their souls, as manifested in their outward ways.

We might think no one should be called a saint until he becomes perfectly holy in experience. But that is not God's way. He calls us saints from the first moment of our faith in Christ, and then bids us live as saints should live. He calls us His children, and then exhorts us to be obedient children. He sanctifies us by the blood of His Son, and

then washes us with the Word that we may be practically sanctified.

He forgives us all our sins and justifies us from all things when we first trust in His Son. We are then eternally forgiven. This is our standing. Yet as our actual state is often poor, there is a forgiveness we may have need of every day. That is the Father's forgiveness, as dealing with the state of His family. The moment you trusted Christ, your responsibility as a sinner having to do with the God of judgment was ended forever. From that moment your standing has been perfect. But at that same instant your responsibility as a *child*, having to do with your *Father*, began. If you fail in this, if your state is low and your Father is dishonored thereby, do not fall back upon the truth of your standing and say, "I have no sins to confess," but go at once to your loving Father and own all the failure, judge the low state, and seek His grace to rise to a higher and better condition of soul in which He will be glorified by your life. Let it always be your aim to have your state come up to your standing, that grace may be magnified in all your ways.

Communion

God has given us His truth that our thoughts may be fashioned like unto His own. This is to enjoy communion with Him. Our previous study, on standing and state, naturally prepares the way for the consideration of this blessed theme of realized fellowship with God, "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Timothy 1:9). He, who has thus so richly blessed us, desires to have us in living, happy communion with Himself, and this is the instinctive desire of every renewed soul. By nature and practice we are alienated and

an enemy to God by wicked works, but when grace has wrought in the soul—when new birth has taken place—at once there springs up a yearning for fellowship with the blessed One whom now we address by the Spirit as “Abba Father” (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6).

Now this communion is not a human thing. Man in the flesh can have no fellowship with God. It is only known and enjoyed in the power of the Spirit. The direct means for its maintenance are the Word of God and prayer. In the Bible, God speaks to me. In prayer, I speak to Him. I use the word prayer here in its widest application; not merely as offering petitions, but as lifting up the heart to God in praise likewise.

We have some blessed examples of this in the experience of Paul. Take, for instance, the first eleven chapters of the epistle to the Romans. In chapters 1 to 8, God, by His Spirit, unfolds what we might call the glorious, divine philosophy of the plan of salvation; while in chapters 9 to 11 he unfolds His dispensational ways. What is the result of the soul’s apprehension of all this? It leads to an outburst of praise that fairly bubbles up in exultant joy from the apostle’s soul in verse 33 of chapter 11: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!” This is communion; and a most hallowed and blissful thing it is to be taken up with the marvelous counsels and ways of God.

In Ephesians 1 we have another lovely example of the same thing. In the early part of the chapter there is a wonderful opening up of God’s eternal purpose. Then from verse 15 the apostle is in prayer that others may enter into and enjoy these precious things, so infinitely beyond mere human comprehension. Again, in chapter 3, the truth of the great mystery, which we take up in the next section, is opened up, and in verse 14 he says: “For this cause [that is, because of the power of this truth over his own soul] I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”—and what is the burden of this prayer? That the believers to whom he writes “may be able to comprehend

with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height [of this stupendous mystery]; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (verses 18,19). And once more a volume of praise goes up from his own heart: "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20,21). The truth gets such a grip on Paul's soul that he longs for all saints to share it, and his heart goes out to God, the Author of it, in unbounded adoration. Again, I repeat, this is communion.

It is not a happy feeling or a state of religious excitement. It is the soul's enjoyment of what God, in His Word, has made known for our edification. He calls us His friends, and He would have His friends share His thoughts.

There can be no true fellowship with God apart from feeding on the Word of God. Reading good books will not take the place of this thoughtful meditation on the Holy Scriptures. Undoubtedly, the Spirit-taught soul will soon begin to discern God's mind, and see His glory manifested even in inanimate nature; but he needs a mind well stored with Scripture to lead him up to this.

And now another important point: there can be no true communion with God while unjudged evil is tolerated in the life. You cannot enjoy God and indulge in sin at the same time; even as you cannot enjoy meditation on the Scriptures while practicing that which is unholy. In Bunyan's Bible it was written, "This Book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this Book." Don't overlook this, dear believer. Be clean. Be practically holy. Then you can enjoy God's Word and the Holy Spirit will use it as the means of leading out your heart to God and filling your soul with praise. This is being in communion with the Highest.

Men talk of being "in touch with the Infinite," who both ignore the Scriptures as the written Word, and Christ Jesus the living Word. And by that they mean to reach a state of philosophic calmness of mind which, in the case of men

proudly turning from the Cross of Christ, is like a blind man on the edge of a cliff refusing the hand stretched forth to save him, and plunging headlong, seeking calmly to assure himself that he would alight on a bed of down in place of jagged rocks. His calmness would be but foolhardiness; and so is all this empty talk of being in tune with the Spirit of the Universe while refusing God's testimony.

Do not be deceived by the sham, my reader. With the Word of God speaking in power to your soul, walk in the Spirit, not fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, and you shall know the real and the true. Thus shall you enjoy, on earth, a sweet foretaste of what is to be the everlasting portion of all the redeemed—participation in the joy of your Lord.

The Assembly as The Body of Christ

At the time of his conversion on the Damascus road, the germ of a great truth was revealed to Paul, which later became the chiefest in the galaxy of doctrines which it was his mission, as an apostle, to make known "for the obedience of faith" (Romans 16:26). It was involved in the challenge of the Lord of glory, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" (Acts 9:4). For the first time it was then declared that Christ and His saints of this age of grace are one. To touch the feeblest of them is to touch Him: for they are all members of one body of which He is the glorified Head in heaven.

This doctrine of the one body is never referred to by any other apostle than Paul. He calls it "the fellowship [or, dispensation] of the mystery" (Galatians 3:9) which he had especially been entrusted with. It was the characteristic truth of his large and varied ministry.

It is this that he is speaking of in Romans 16:25-27: "Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to

my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets [or, by prophetic writings; that is, his own], according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen." The nature of this mystery is unfolded in Ephesians 3:1-12. There he writes of the dispensation of the grace of God given him toward the Gentiles, and he adds: "How that by revelation [not through studying the Bible] He made known unto me the mystery ... which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel ... to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God."

It is a passage of wondrous scope and blessedness, and I cannot attempt to expound it here, but what I would have the believer note is that the truth of Jew and Gentile being formed by the Spirit into one body, upon being born of God, and by that same Spirit linked up to Christ as Head in heaven, was a truth never before made known. The Old Testament will be searched in vain for it. It is not there, because it was "hid in God." It was the secret purpose of His heart only to be revealed after the rejection of His Son. It actually became a fact when the Holy Spirit was given on Pentecost. To this Paul refers when he writes: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is [the] Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:12,13).

To this one body every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ belongs. The gift of the Holy Spirit, who indwells all saved people, makes us one with every other Christian on the face of the earth. This is the only true “Catholic and Apostolic Church.” At the beginning there was none other. “The Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). There was no thought of any other membership, though until the special revelation given to Paul, it was not seen that this involved membership in the body of Christ. The fact existed prior to the knowledge of it. Now, every saint should have clear light as to it, because it is everywhere declared, or taken for granted, in Paul’s epistles.

Ephesians is largely occupied with it; setting forth the purpose of God to head up all things in Christ, and, preparatory to this, the formation of the one body. Then Colossians gives us the other side, magnifying Christ as Head, and pressing upon Christians their responsibility to own no other head, but to be in all things subject to Him. First Corinthians takes all this up in a practical way, showing what the outcome should be in our daily walk as members one of another and members of Christ.

Now, in what sense is this great truth “made known ... for the obedience of faith”? Manifestly it can only mean that it is a truth each believer is expected to hold in a practical way. And this surely involves the recognition of but one body and one Head, which necessarily leaves one outside of all human systems and apart from all recognition of human heads. “The Church must have a head!” was the Romanist’s challenge to Luther, as he began to set forth the claims of the Papacy. “Yes,” replied the mighty champion of the reformation, “and that Head is Christ!”

Never allow yourself in any association, dear believer, where you will have to give this up. Hold the Head at all costs. And if you hold the Head, you can consistently own but one body; for one head with many bodies is unthinkable.

“To which of the various bodies of Christ do you belong?” I was once asked by a clergyman. I replied, “There is one body, and I know no other.”

This should not result in unkind feelings or hard, critical thoughts concerning others, equally dear to Christ, who may not be enlightened upon this great mystery. The very fact that we are all members one of another should hinder this. All may not see alike, and will not until the Lord Jesus comes; but that need not prevent fervent love going out to every member of Christ's body on earth.

"What church do you belong to?" an evangelist was once asked by a well-meaning lady.

"I am a Christian," was the reply, "I belong to the body of Christ."

"Oh, of course," was the retort, "I know that. So am I, and I am also a member of a church."

"Ah, my sister," he answered, "that is just the difference between us. You are a Christian *and*. I am only a Christian. Once I too was a Christian *and*, but when I learned that 'there is one body and one Spirit' I ceased to be a Christian *and*; I have ever since been simply a Christian."

"But," she exclaimed in evident astonishment, "in that case I do not see how you distinguish yourself from other Christians."

"Why, you see," was the quiet reply, "I have no desire to distinguish myself from fellow-Christians. I am one with them all; and I desire them all to see in me a fellow-member of Christ's body."

This is what I would commend to you. When God saved you He put you in the body of Christ. What other membership do you need or desire? You are a member of the Church of God, the Church of the Firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. What more would you have?

Before the confusion of sectarianism came in, "all that believed were together" (Acts 2:44), and it was said of them on an ever-memorable occasion that those who "received His Word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them [that is, unto those already baptized by the Spirit into the one body] about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:41,42).

Nothing else is needed for faith today. God's Word remains and it is for each believer to act upon it, regardless of the ever-increasing apostasy. If only two or three do so, there is fellowship and Christ will be enjoyed as He cannot be when His place as Head is forgotten and the truth is ignored that "there is one body" (Ephesians 4:4).

The Assembly in Its Local Aspect

Side by side with the truth of the Assembly as the body of Christ, is the counter truth of the local assembly, the company of believers in any given locality, acting on the ground of the one body.

Perhaps it might be said that, strictly speaking, there is no declared doctrine of the local assembly, but both the Acts and the Epistles give us many illustrative incidents and historical notices which enable us to clearly see the divine method of ordering these companies of believers gathered to the peerless name of the Lord Jesus Christ. For His own words: "Where two or three are gathered together in [or, unto] My Name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20), clearly apply to all scriptural assemblings of His people. He will ever be the Center and recognized Head, who will lead the praises and worship of His saints, as it is also written, "In the midst of the church [assembly] will I sing praise unto Thee" (Hebrews 2:12).

In the beginning the local assembly at Jerusalem and the Assembly, the body of Christ, were one. Every member of that body was, for a brief season at least, a part of the local assembly in that city. Then, as these believers were scattered abroad, as visitors from Pentecost returned to their homes, or others were driven from Jerusalem by persecution—as the gospel also was carried to Samaria, and then to the Gentiles—wherever a company of members of

Christ's body was found there was another local assembly. This was the only way in which separate gatherings were formed. "Two or three" in any given locality were drawn together by the Spirit to the Name of the Lord Jesus, and thus a local assembly sprang into existence. To this little company others were added, as grace revealed Christ to their souls, and they in turn became partakers of the blessings of the Spirit's baptism, owning the rejected Jesus as Lord.

Thus all was simple. There was no human organization, no cumbrous ecclesiastical machinery, no sectional membership. He who was recognized as a member of Christ's body in Jerusalem, traveling or going elsewhere, upon making himself known there as one subject to Christ the Head, was at once accounted as one of them. He had found his own company. From an early period letters of commendation were given to such brethren that they might be, at once, accredited in places where they were personally unknown (Romans 16:1,2; 2 Corinthians 3:1; Acts 18:27). But this was all. There was no dismissing a "member" from the church in Ephesus that might "join" the church in Philippi. If someone was a known member of Christ's body in Ephesus, he was gladly acknowledged as such in Philippi when his claim was properly attested.

As one goes over all this, how the conviction is forced upon the soul that Christendom has gotten far indeed from the simplicity of early days! And that very fact leads us to inquire: is it possible now to act just as they did then?—when love was warm and before evil and pernicious doctrines had honeycombed what should have ever been in an outward way "The church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). The answer is that all this declension and failure was foreseen by the Holy Spirit, and directions have been clearly given how to proceed when such unhappy ruin should have come in. In Acts 20, where Paul delivered his farewell address to the elder brethren of the Ephesian assembly, he warned them of the very things we have been considering; but at the close he simply says, "I commend you *to God, and to the*

word of His grace" (verse 32). God's Word therefore is all-sufficient, whatever the cold-heartedness and backsliding that may be prevalent.

What course, then, are we directed to take when such evil days have come? Build sects and systems, walled about with iron-clad creeds and buttressed by human regulations? Not at all. What then? Go back to "that which was from the beginning." Find out how things were at the first, and act on what the Word of God makes known.

But shall we not then be literally swamped by unholy errorists of every description? This does not necessarily follow; for the same Word clearly tells us who are to be accepted to communion, and who refused Christian fellowship. We are called to receive all whose doctrines and ways give evidence that they are members of Christ and subject to Him as Lord and Head. If a man is not sound in his teaching, he may be a member of Christ but he is not subject to Him, and is not to be received until the evil is judged. And the same applies to moral questions. One who has fallen into unholy ways, may, after all, be a believer whose failure is but temporary; still, we dare not receive him in that state. We must wait until we see the evidence of his subjection to Christ in the judgment of his sin.

This is largely ignored in Christendom generally, which has become like a great house in which valuable and common vessels are all mixed up together. If a man would be a "vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use," he is called to purge himself out from this mixture, by separating himself from it. He is then to find fellowship among similar separated ones, and to "follow righteousness, faith, charity [or, love], peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:19-22); and so walking together the ground of the one body is maintained. If companies in different places are similarly gathered, they occupy the same position, and thus, in principle, go back to "that which was from the beginning."

To do so involves no pretension. It is not "rebuilding the Church." It is owning the ruin of the Church and, in

simplicity, “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Difficulties may and will arise. Troubles will come up. Sorrows will have to be faced. But if there be a cleaving to Christ and His truth, the Word of God will be found all-sufficient to meet every case that appears.

Owing to the broken and defiled conditions in Christendom, more care will need to be exercised as to whom fellowship is to be extended. But the heart should ever be open to all whose ways and doctrine give good evidence that they are of the one body and subject to the one Lord. Special discernment will be needed, lest by association with the unholy, such become partakers of other men’s sins; for to go on with one who is in an evil course, even to the extent of greeting him in a brotherly way, is to make oneself “partaker of his evil deeds” (2 John 7-11).

But if the Scriptures are allowed to be judge, every difficulty will vanish. In the beginning what applied to one assembly applied to all, as all were one; and if the same principle is recognized by believers gathering in the simple way indicated above, it will solve many perplexities and keep from isolation and independency, which are the twin enemies of practical fellowship between local companies of believers.

Baptism and Connected Truths

Baptism is the initiatory ordinance of Christianity. It expresses subjection to the Lordship of Christ. To fritter away what God has said concerning this beautifully expressive ordinance, as some do today, on the plea that it did not belong to the special revelation given to Paul, and consequently has no place in the dispensation of the mystery, is to ignore or pervert what our apostle has himself

left on record regarding it. It is true that he was sent “not to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 1:17). If people made more of the servant than they should, he was thankful he had baptized none, save a very few, lest any should say he baptized in his own name. Nevertheless he *did* baptize; and when, for good and sufficient reasons, he did not administer the ordinance himself, he saw that someone else, someone of his fellow-laborers, did so. Even at Corinth as the result of his preaching “many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).

Baptism has a wider scope than Christianity, but no amount of reasoning can eliminate it from Christianity or from the epistles of Paul, which fully set forth the new order. The young Christian therefore should search the Scriptures on this as on all other doctrines and practices, and act before God according to what he finds written there.

I do not propose here to enter into a discussion as to the subject or mode of baptism. But it is my present purpose to press upon the reader the distinctive instruction of Paul as to the lines of truth exemplified by, or connected with, baptism unto the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. For in the revelation of the Trinity we have Christianity in its essence. The Father so loved the world that He gave the Son, who became man, and in the power of the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God for our salvation. This is the grand fundamental truth each baptized one is called upon to defend, if need be, at the cost of his life. In baptism, Christ’s death is set forth in symbol. He, in amazing grace, because of our sins, bore on the cross the awful baptism of divine wrath, that we might enjoy forever the living favor of the God of all grace. This is pictured as the baptized one is immersed beneath the water. Every baptism is thus a fresh reminder of what we owe to the Lord Jesus. Like the communion supper, it sets forth His death (Romans 6:3).

Then, secondly, it pictures our death with Him. If He died beneath the judgment of God for sin, it was as taking

our place; so we, in this ordinance, are “buried with Him by baptism into [or, unto] death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). For the baptized one to be living a careless, worldly life, while yet enjoying what is called “a good conscience about, or through baptism,” is a shameful thing. If baptized to death, it is that you should daily own in a practical way that you are through with the world, severed from its follies and all its ways through identification with Christ in death, and now living on the resurrection side of the tomb, called to walk in accordance with the new life in Christ risen.

Thirdly, baptism answers to a soldier’s donning the regimental uniform: “For as many of you as have been baptized into [or, unto] Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). This is not to say that all the baptized are truly Christ’s. That would be a grave error indeed. But he who has been baptized unto Christ has thereby taken upon him the badge of subjection to Christ. A man being recruited for the army is a soldier the moment he signs up. But the uniform marks him out as such. Even so, baptism is the putting on of Christ and owning Him as Lord.

Closely connected with this is the fourth proposition: Baptism is for the dead. “Else what shall they do which are baptized for [or, over] the dead [ones], if the dead [ones] rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead [ones]?” (1 Corinthians 15:29). Here it is not baptized for a dead Christ, as some would have it, because the word rendered “dead” is plural in each instance. Neither is it a vicarious baptism by living persons on behalf of others who have died unbaptized. This is a foolish and hurtful heterodox notion maintained by Mormons and a few other evil sects. But it is simply that each baptized one, since the first generation of Christians, has been, by baptism, filling up the ranks, taking the place of those who have died in the service of Christ. We are *all* baptized for the dead. We have taken their vacated places, and we are now called upon to fight the Lord’s battles in their stead. If there were no resurrection this would be folly. We might better enjoy

the world while it lasts, knowing that we must soon depart and then eternal unconsciousness follow! But, in view of resurrection, we take the place of Christ's soldiers, even though we "stand in jeopardy every hour" (1 Corinthians 15:30; and note the following four verses).

And now let me ask you who read these pages: Is this indeed what baptism means to you? With many, I know, it is merely a *form*. With others, it is a matter of duty, a command to be obeyed in a legal spirit. But to the instructed Christian it is a sweet and precious privilege, setting forth what Christ has suffered for our redemption, our identification with that blessed Saviour in His death, and the acknowledgement of His Lordship in the daily life.

If it does not, or has not meant all this to you, your place is on your knees in self-judgment and humiliation of soul, seeking grace to turn in singleness of heart from all that is of the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life—and to yield yourself unreservedly unto Christ, as one alive from the dead, who can never forget that the Red Sea of judgment rolls forever between you and the world that crucified Him. He is worthy of your highest, best service. He gave Himself for you, and thereby purchased you—body, soul and spirit—for His glory. Take heed that you do not defraud Him out of the fruit of His bitter cross.

The Lord's Supper

Apart from the historical accounts of its institution in the first three Gospels, Paul is the only New Testament writer who communicates anything to us on the precious theme of the Christian's "forget-me-not" feast—the Lord's Supper. Yet, it is of such importance that he received a special revelation from heaven concerning it. This he passes on for our learning in the great Church epistle, First

Corinthians. This letter has well been called “the Charter of the Church,” because of the fulness of its instruction in all matters pertaining to assembly life. After Romans it is, I believe, the most important portion of the New Testament to become well grounded in. It should be read and reread until one is thoroughly familiar with every part of it and it controls the reins and the heart.

To chapters 10 and 11 we turn for truth in connection with the memorial feast. In chapter 10 we have “*the Lord’s table*,” and in chapter 11, “*the Lord’s supper*.” We need to apprehend the true character of the *table* before we can properly enter into the blessing of the *supper*.

Three tables are brought before us, each standing for a distinct fellowship or communion. In 1 Corinthians 10:18 we are told that “Israel after the flesh ... are ... partakers of the altar,” which Malachi calls “the table of the LORD [Jehovah]” (Malachi 1:12). The heathen are partakers of “the table of devils [or, demons],” while Christians are partakers of the Lord’s table (1 Corinthians 10:21).

I have sometimes heard very untaught people speak of some celebration of the Lord’s supper other than the one they attended as the table of demons. This is a shocking perversion of the truth declared in 1 Corinthians 10. No Christian celebration is dedicated to devils. All are in the name of Christ, however mistaken people may be as to method and principles.

It is not therefore correct for any particular company of Christians to claim that they alone have the Lord’s table. Every table spread with bread and wine upon it in remembrance of the one offering of the Lord Jesus on the cross, is His. There may be persons received there who should not be, and some excluded who have divine title to participate; but it is the Lord’s nevertheless, and He will judge accordingly. His table may be connected with unscriptural practices and teachings, but it remains His still; and He, as Son over the house of God, takes note of every infringement of His rights and authority, and of every unholy thing linked with the table that, in symbol, sets forth His death. It is not incumbent on any one to select

one of the many companies of believers in Christendom, and decide which one possesses the Lord's table. What we are responsible to do is to see that we are identified with those who are gathered in a scriptural way and who observe the supper of the Lord "as it is written."

The symbolism of the table is explained in verse 16: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread [or, loaf] which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" This is divinely simple, and in full accord with the words of the Lord Jesus when He instituted this feast of love. At His table we remember Him in death. The cup and the loaf, apart, tell of death accomplished, as when the blood is separated from the body.

A whole loaf upon the table would seem to be indicated by the next verse: "For we being many are one bread [loaf], and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread [loaf]" (verse 17). The bread then symbolizes not only the actual body of the Lord given for us upon the cross, but it also pictures His mystical body, to which all believers belong. In partaking of the loaf, we express our fellowship one with another, as well as individual communion with the Lord. But this must be in separation from evil, as verse 21 plainly teaches.

In chapter 11 the mind of the Spirit is occupied with the supper itself rather than with its symbolism as in chapter 10. In verses 23 to 26 we learn that Paul had received a special revelation regarding the supper, yet fully agreeing with the accounts given by the three evangelists—Matthew, Mark and Luke—only that the thought of the Lord's return is added to the remembrance of Him in His death: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death *till He come*" (verse 26). Thus are the cross and the glory linked together for faith, and ever kept before the soul in this observance of the Lord's Supper.

The word rendered "show" is often translated "preach" in the New Testament. Every celebration of the eucharist (as the early Christians loved to call this feast—a word meaning *thanksgiving*) is in itself a sermon. It is a proclaiming

of the Lord's death; and were there more holiness, and consequently more power with it, we might often expect to see 1 Corinthians 14:24,25 fulfilled when we are thus gathered together.

Some of us will never forget such an instance a number of years ago in Sacramento, California, when an unconverted man from Japan was present. We had barely replaced the bread and cup upon the table, before this heathen man rose to his feet in great emotion, and burst out in prayer, about as follows: "O God, I all broke up to pieces. I, a poor sinner. For long time, for one whole year, I fight you hard—but here I see your people eat the bread, drink the wine, that show how Jesus He die for sinners. O God, I can fight no more—I all break down. I take Jesus; He be my Saviour now!"

And that very day, at his earnest request, he was baptized as owning his personal faith in Christ. For years he was in fellowship as simply gathered to the name of the Lord. Alas, that such scenes are not more common!

One more point and I am done. Never become so occupied with the *form* that you neglect the *spirit* of the Lord's Supper. It is a place for the heart's affections to flow out. Do not make it a ritualistic observance, but let it ever be an occasion where Christ Himself is before the soul, who has said, "This do in remembrance of Me."

Books, Companionships, and Recreation

Paul was not an ascetic. He was a sane, healthy, well-rounded man, intensely devoted to the One who had saved him. He loved books, he enjoyed congenial company, and he recognized the profit to be derived from temperate

recreation. He has, by the Spirit's inspiration, left on record enough on all these lines to serve as a guide to believers who may be somewhat perplexed at times as to where the line should be drawn between what would glorify God and be a means of blessing to their own souls, and what would dishonor Him and hinder spiritual growth.

The writings and addresses of Paul show that he was a widely-read and well-informed man. He loved books; when he was in prison the second time, in a Roman dungeon, he longed for books. He wrote to Timothy, "Bring ... the books, but especially the parchments" (2 Timothy 4:13). What these books were we have now no means of knowing; but, we may be sure, they were of a profitable character. The believer needs books also; but let him make it a rule that he gives his time only to what will edify.

"Be a man of one book!" wrote Wesley. But he was himself a voluminous reader. What he meant was that the Bible should have the central place, and all other books should be read as subservient to it. If the Scriptures are not neglected, but thoughtfully read and meditated upon, one's spiritual judgment will soon become sufficiently clarified to enable him to discern what other books can be read with edification. The godly soul will instinctively shrink from trashy novels, light, frivolous literature, and anything unclean and unholy. But Paul shows himself familiar with the history, science, and poetry of his day. He refers on occasion to historical events; he illustrates by the use of scientific facts; he quotes, when in keeping with his theme, what "certain of your own poets" have said, and in this we need not fear to follow him, if there be in us but the heart for Christ there was in him.

It is to be feared that many Christians have been hindered by a hard, legal spirit on this very line. All reading has been tabooed that was not exactly spiritual. This is a grave mistake, and leads to extreme narrowness of mind and even positively hinders mental development, thus restricting one's ability to enjoy what God Himself has given us in His Word. "Reading makes a full man," is an

old saying that is worthy of remembrance; only be careful to “take forth the precious from the vile.”

And now, a word as to companionships. Paul enjoyed association with others. He loved fellowship. He appreciated friends, but his friends were among the people of God. To an Aquila or a Priscilla he could pour out his heart, and could enjoy to the full their tender affection. But, you may be sure, he never was found lounging about with an Elymas or even Gallio! And right here is where many a saint is not faithful. There is no clean break with the world. Old companionships are still sought and enjoyed. No wonder there is little or no growth. No wonder there are so many stunted Christians. “Come out from among them, and be ye separate” (2 Corinthians 6:17) is the Word of the Lord to all who are dilly-dallying with the world after confessing Christ. “The friendship of the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4). Find your friends among the friends of Christ! Let your companions be those who love His name, and then be careful not to let good fellowship degenerate into careless levity.

This is commonly the case where young persons of opposite sexes mingle much together. There is no reason why Christian young men and women should not meet and enjoy one another’s company in a pure and holy way. But often it is otherwise. If you feel there is a snare in such commingling, then be honest with your own souls and avoid what might dishonor Christ and hinder spiritual growth. Timothy was exhorted to treat elder brethren with the reverence due to fathers, “younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, *with all purity*” (1 Timothy 5:1,2). The last three words are important, and if overlooked, will lead to many a snare.

Young people need recreation; older ones, too, for that matter. It is a mistake to suppose that body and mind must always be keyed up to serious pursuits. “Bodily exercise profiteth [a] little” (1 Timothy 4:8)—not a great deal, but a “little.” Therefore beware of giving it an undue place, but do not neglect it. And in all your recreation see that there

is nothing that hinders godliness, for godliness is of profit both in this life and the next.

Anyone in reading the epistles can observe that in Paul's many references to athletics, there is no suggestion that he in any way disapproves of the exercise in itself. The dangers are two: first, associations; second, excess. Be temperate in all things (1 Corinthians 9:25), and *be as careful of your companionships in your recreation as in the other affairs of life.*

Unduly rigid persons often forget young men and women have bodies to be cared for and developed in a healthful way. On the other hand, pleasure-lovers forget they have immortal souls, of infinitely more importance than the body in which they dwell. Seek therefore to be a well-balanced Christian, putting first things first; and as to minor matters, ever keeping Christ's glory in view. And if you are enabled to have a healthy soul in a healthy body, see that you use your strength for Him who for our sakes "endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2). "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16), and thus you will be enabled to "do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

The Testimony of The Lord

To Paul, the testimony committed by the ascended Lord was dearer than life. Faithfulness to it involved a martyr's death, and that he met with a Christlike resignation and calmness of soul that is blessed to contemplate.

It was his desire that those associated with him in his special ministry should be men of like spirit. Hence his words to Timothy: "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord ... but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God"

(2 Timothy 1:8). And again he says, “That good thing [or, deposit] which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us” (verse 14).

The testimony of the Lord embraces the corollary of truths connected with Christ risen and glorified. Some of these precious themes we have been briefly examining in the foregoing chapters, and we are yet to speak of others, if God will. But what I would now press upon the conscience of each saint who may read these lines is individual responsibility to make known this testimony and to hold it oneself, as a sacred deposit, in the power of the Holy Ghost.

There is all the difference in the world between holding particular “views” of justification, sanctification, acceptance, the one body, the Lord’s second coming, and kindred lines of truth, and maintaining the testimony of the Lord. One may hold the correct view of sanctification and yet not walk in subjection to the Word that cleanses. One may subscribe to scriptural prophetic teaching and not “love His appearing.” One may hold the doctrine of the one body and yet remain in human systems that by their very constitution deny it. One may have the right view of eternal life and yet live as though this world were all. But no one can maintain the testimony of the Lord who is not personally a self-judged, humble saint, walking in the truth, holding the Head, and laying hold on that which is really life. Yet to thus keep the good deposit every believer is called; and there will be eternal loss of reward for all who fail to do so. This cannot be done in the strength of nature. Only as one walks in the Spirit will the needed grace be given.

What Paul calls “the testimony” in 2 Timothy, he designates as “the faith” in his first letter to the same devoted young servant. Note his solemn words, and remember they are as truly applicable to you, if a child of God, as they were to Timothy when first written: “This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a [or, the] good warfare; holding faith [literally, *the* faith; i.e., the

truth believed], and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning [the] faith have made shipwreck” (1 Timothy 1:18,19). Now, carefully observe, you can only hold the faith of God’s elect in a godly way, as you maintain a good conscience. If you ever put away a good conscience—if you allow yourself to go on with anything of which your conscience does not approve when instructed by the Word of God—you will lose the faith and make shipwreck of the testimony.

Many people seem to think of doctrinal error as a comparatively small and unimportant thing; but where people give up a line of truth once enjoyed in the Spirit’s power, or once controlling heart and life, close investigation will generally prove that moral evil of some character was behind it. When men get out of touch with holiness, they lose their grip of the truth; or, rather, the truth loses power over them. In the third chapter of 1 Timothy the deacons are described as “holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience” (verse 9). This emphasizes what we have just been noticing—there must be activity of conscience if the testimony of the Lord is to be maintained and the good deposit kept.

Further exhortation, addressed to Timothy, each believer may profitably take to himself. In chapter 4 of the first epistle, verses 6 and 12 to 16 we read, “If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister [or, servant] of Jesus Christ, *nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained....* Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.... Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. *Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.*” All this is most salutary instruction and must not be overlooked.

I sincerely hope that many young men who read these

lines may some day be called of God to preach the Word and declare the testimony of the Lord publicly. If so, I trust the principle laid down in the passages we have been noticing will never be forgotten. "Thyself" first; then "the doctrine." God wants holy men to serve in holy things.

It is to be feared that many a young man has been unwisely encouraged to preach, because of a glib tongue and pleasing address, who did not have the necessary godliness behind it that would ensure success as a winner of souls and a helper of saints. Gift, divorced from piety, may do untold mischief; but as James Caughey used to say, "A holy minister is an awful [powerful] weapon in the hands of God." Where this personal fitness is lacking, there may be brilliant service for a time; easygoing Christians may applaud and admire; but the end of it all is likely to be a crash that may bring many others down with the poor fallen preacher, who was all the time "trafficking in unfelt truth" (to use an expression coined, I believe, by C. H. Mackintosh), and whose true condition has at last been exposed.

The testimony of the Lord is like the ark of the covenant which was borne through the wilderness on the priests' shoulders. So should the truth of God be proclaimed by priestly men who live in fellowship with Him whose testimony it is.

The Coming of The Lord

Sometime ago I listened to a well-known clergyman giving a lecture upon a recently completed world tour. He frankly told his audience that he did not believe in the personal pre-millennial coming of the Lord. Yet in candor he felt compelled to make the following admission: wherever he had found special devotedness among missionaries

laboring in distant lands and inquired what it was that enabled them not to count their own lives dear, but to toil so earnestly for the salvation of the heathen, the answer had invariably come: "Because the Lord's return is near; I look for Him to come again, and I want to accomplish what I can while waiting for His advent."

This is indeed as it should be. The truth of the second coming of the Lord was the guiding star of Paul's whole life and service as a Christian and God would have the same true of us.

A century ago, almost total ignorance prevailed among Christians as to the manner and object of the Lord's second coming. Today this precious truth has been carried into practically every nook and corner of the earth. No thoughtful person, it would seem, could fail to recognize in this the sounding forth of the midnight cry: "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him!" (Matthew 25:6). However, the setting of dates, and confusing the Church's hope with Israel's expectations has been used by the enemy also, for when the Word is not "rightly divided" on these two subjects, confusion and uncertainty are sure to result.

The proper hope of the Church is the Lord's return in Person, in the clouds, to raise the dead in Christ and change the bodies of the living believers, who shall "in a moment" be "caught up together ... to meet the Lord in the air." There are no dates or time periods connected with this event. The early Christians were taught to wait expectantly for it (see 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10), and it is still our present hope. It is this phase of the coming that is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 1 Corinthians 15:51-56, and many other Scriptures.

Israel's hopes are of a different character, and with them the "times and seasons" are linked. They were taught to look for the descent of Messiah in great power and glory to the earth, to scatter His foes, regather His chosen people, judge among the nations, and establish His earthly, visible kingdom upon the ruins of all human dominions. Such is the teaching of the prophets. Paul shows clearly that

all this is not superseded by the Christian revelation; but when the appearing of the Lord to the earth takes place, all the saints of the present age, or Church period, previously changed and glorified, will appear with Him in glory as a special bridal company in the day of His triumph. Of this 2 Thessalonians largely treats.

These two stages of the Lord's return are not two comings, but one. Only He pauses in the air, on His way to the earth to receive the heavenly saints, to reward each one and apportion to each his place in the coming kingdom, according to the measure of their devotedness in the period of their testimony here. Of this I wish to write more particularly in the next chapter, so shall not dwell on it now.

It is often said by objectors to what is called the "pre-millennial coming," that the Lord will not return until He comes as Judge at the expiration of the thousand years' reign of righteousness. To answer this, I want to put several propositions in syllogistic form, which I believe to be incontrovertible.

1. There can be no millennium until Christ comes, because the resurrection of believers takes place prior to the millennium, and at Christ's return; consequently, there can be no millennium until He returns (Revelation 20:5,6; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-16).

2. There can be no millennium until Christ comes, because Antichrist is to be destroyed at the second advent; consequently Christ's return must precede the millennium (2 Thessalonians 2).

3. There can be no millennium until Christ returns, because Satan is to be bound immediately preceding the second advent. There can therefore be no millennium until Christ appears (Revelation 20:3).

4. There can be no millennium until Christ returns, because the millennial kingdom is to be the scene of the risen saints' rewards. These get their reward at Christ's second coming; so there can be no millennium until He returns (Revelation 20:4; 22:12).

5. There can be no millennium until Christ returns,

because Israel must be regathered to their land and purged of their sins before the millennium. But Israel is to be regathered at Christ's second coming; therefore there can be no millennium until Christ comes (Zechariah 12 and 13).

6. There can be no millennium until Christ returns, because Gentile dominion is abolished at Christ's second coming; consequently there can be no millennium until Christ returns.

7. There can be no millennium until Christ comes, for the Church age only ends, and the fulness of the Gentiles will have come in at Christ's second coming. There can therefore be no millennium until Christ comes (Romans 11).

To these propositions many more might be added, but these are sufficient, I feel certain, to prove the case for any who will search the Scriptures daily, whether these things are so (Acts 17:11).

But a word of warning before closing. It is a poor thing to simply hold correct views of the coming of the Lord, if the heart be not engaged with the blessed Person who is soon to return. We are called to wait for God's Son from heaven (1 Thessalonians 1:10). If He be not the object of our souls, correct views will avail little to keep us from the power of the world and in the path of devotion to Himself. But if He indeed be ever precious to us, we shall know the truth of what is written: "Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). At the sound of His voice we shall fly to Him as the steel to the magnet. Until then, be it ours ever to be held by the power of His attraction.

The Voyage Ended: The Judgment Seat of Christ

Soon those who sail with Paul will have weathered the last gale, endured the final storm, and, with the voyage over the sea of time completed, will have reached their desired haven. Even though the vessel of testimony may seem to fall to pieces, still either swimming to shore, or “some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship” (Acts 27:44), all shall escape safely to land—and not to find themselves among strangers either, needing what charity’s kindness might bestow, but welcomed there by all their brethren of all ages, and above all by Him whose loving care had watched over all their way and whose grace will have safely brought them home.

Depend upon it: no self-denial for His name’s sake will then seem to have been too great; no trials because of His truth will appear to have been too many; no suffering or toil for the spreading of His gospel too much, in that day. Nay, on the contrary, how many will there be who would then gladly give the wealth of a world, were it theirs to offer, if they had only been more devoted to Him in the day of His rejection, more unworldly, more Christ-like, and more concerned about the dire need of the perishing thousands about them. But the day for faithfulness to an absent Lord will then be over, and the hour of manifestation will have arrived.

Paul himself, looking on to this solemn time, could write: “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a [or, the] good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:6-8). It was not the final “day of judgment

and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7) that he had in view. Paul had no thought of ever being judged for his sins. He knew all that had been settled in Christ’s cross. Hence for him, as for all believers, there could be no judgment in the future, so far as the question of sin was concerned. But elsewhere he tells us that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). And he shows us that, for the Christian, this will mean a complete manifestation of all his works and motives, that the Lord may express His own mind regarding them, and reward all that was of His Spirit in the life of His people after His grace had saved them.

The third chapter of 1 Corinthians is most instructive in this connection. In its primary application, the subject under consideration is the building up of the assembly of God in its local aspect. But the principle involved applies to all Christian work and service. Every believer is building on the rock foundation which is Christ Himself. “Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious [or, costly] stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is” (verses 12,13). I have little doubt that an historical incident was in Paul’s mind as the Spirit led him to pen these words.

Among the “seven wonders” of the ancient world was the magnificent temple of Diana, outside the city of Ephesus. It was built on marshy ground, and before the building could be erected, a great rock foundation had to be laid—the work of years. On this foundation the superstructure was reared under the direction of the most famous “master-builder” of his day. The building was entirely composed of gold, silver, and costly stones. But the roof and the rooms adjoining the main sanctuary, used by the priests and priestesses of Diana, were made of wood, hay, and stubble. On the night that beacon lights on every hilltop of Greece and Asia Minor flashed the news of the birth of an heir to

Philip of Macedon (who became celebrated as Alexander the Great), Erostratus the Ephesian set fire to this temple of Diana. In the morning it was found that the gold, silver and costly stones remained unharmed, while the wood, hay, and stubble had been devoured by the flames.

Now every Christian is building upon the foundation laid through the gospel. All that is in accordance with the Word of God is likened to gold, silver, and costly stones. That which is of the flesh is pictured by the wood, hay, and stubble. At the judgment seat of Christ all will be tested by the fire of infinite holiness. Then everything that was not the fruit of the Spirit will be destroyed. Notice, that "the fire shall try every man's work of what *sort* it is." It does not say "how much it is." It is not quantity, but quality that is in question. A vast amount of so-called Christian work will be destroyed in that day, but all that has really been for Christ will stand the test. "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (verses 14,15). This last clause supposes an extreme case where, if even not one thing is found that can be rewarded, still, so absolutely is salvation of grace that "he himself shall be saved" though all his works be burned up. But verse 5 of chapter 4 shows us that there will be none in that day who will fail utterly of reward: "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and *then shall every man have praise of God.*"

The rewards are pictured in other Scriptures as "crowns." These crowns should never be confounded with salvation, which is entirely of God's sovereign grace. The crowns were given for individual faithfulness after one is saved. There are five different designations used, as follows:

The *incorruptible crown*, promised to all who in godliness and self-control run the Christian race (1 Corinthians 9:25-27). The *crown of rejoicing* for the winner of souls (1 Thessalonians 2:19; Philippians 4:1). The *crown*

of righteousness, for all who love Christ's appearing, and labor now in view of that day (2 Timothy 4:8). The *crown of life*, for those who witness amid trial with unyielding perseverance (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10). The *crown of glory*, for faithfully shepherding the sheep and lambs of Christ's flock (1 Peter 5:1-4).

In Revelation 3:11 the Lord Jesus says: "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." This is an exhortation we may all take heed to, remembering that the Lord's work will be accomplished according to His purpose, whether we have a share in it or not. But it is our happy privilege to be fellow-laborers under God, working in subjection to His Word, to be rewarded when our Saviour comes again. The opportunity to serve will soon be over. May grace be mine and yours, dear reader, to labor on in hope, remembering that "If a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully" (2 Timothy 2:5).

Let me, in closing, urge each Christian to live solely in view of the end of the voyage, so fast approaching, heeding the farewell message of the ascended Lord: "Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12).