

The Coming of the Lord Jesus

His Future Appearance

After His literal physical resurrection from the dead, the Lord Jesus Christ “shewed Himself alive” by appearing to His disciples on many different occasions during a period of forty days. Then He ascended back to the heaven from which He had come (Luke 24:50,51). Such was the Father’s delight and satisfaction in Him and in the work He did on earth, however, that He not only raised Him from the dead, not only received Him back to heaven, but seated Him at His own right hand to share His own throne (Mark 16:19; Hebrews 1:3,13; Revelation 3:21). At this present time there exists in heaven what never was seen before, a glorified man seated upon the throne of God. Before His death the Lord Jesus had foretold His resurrection and ascension to heaven (John 16:28), but He also promised that He would come again (e.g. Matthew 24:30; John 14:1-3).

The New Testament does not frequently employ such terms as ‘second coming’, or even ‘come

again'; usually it refers simply, as in our title, to 'the coming' of Christ, and leaves the context to indicate that the second advent is meant, rather than the first.

It has already been noted in another pamphlet ("The Man Christ Jesus") how that John in his first epistle states quite positively the fundamental character of the incarnation of Christ (1John 4:2,3 – i.e. His birth in a literal body). It is often assumed that the same truth is conveyed in 2John 7, but it should be observed that the form of expression is different. In 1John 4:3 the verb 'is come' is in the perfect tense, and is more properly translated 'has come'. This obviously refers to the historical fact of the incarnation on the occasion of Christ's first advent. In 2John 7, although the A.V. gives the same translation, 'is come' is in the present tense, and should be rendered 'coming' (as J.N.D.) or 'cometh' (as R.V.). Since the present tense sometimes indicates essential fact, irrespective of time, the reference may be to the incarnation as an abiding fact subsequent to the first advent. Or the reference may be specifically to the second advent. In either case, either inferentially or specifically, it would seem that we are required to recognize that the return of Christ must be 'in flesh', and that he who denies this is 'a deceiver and an antichrist'.

Two facts would tend to confirm this conclusion. Firstly, some of the most blatantly antichristian 'Christian' cults of these last times are marked by a denial of the physical return of Christ. Secondly, the truth of the Lord's return, which is invariably presented as personal and corporeal, is taught in almost all of the New Testament books, so that it cannot be denied logically, except by denying the inspiration of Holy Scripture. It is so closely woven into the fabric of the New Testament that it cannot

be torn out without destroying the whole. Nor can it be spiritualised to the extent that would be necessary to remove from the Scripture entirely the truth of the Lord's personal coming in flesh, without bringing to disrepute and even ridicule not only the science of interpretation, but even Scripture itself.

Sad to say there is much difference of judgement amongst even true Christians as to the details of the Lord's coming, for Satan would gladly confuse the saints in respect of their 'blessed hope'. In these lesser matters we may, and must, exercise that love and forbearance that is surely to be expected among children of the same Father, at the same time as we analyse, define, and uncompromisingly contend for, such aspects of the matter as may rightly be regarded as fundamental. It is our object in this present article to seek to avoid matters of difference, and to set forth those truths relating to the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ which every true Christian might be expected to believe.

We are reminded in the first chapter of the book of the Acts of how, on the occasion of the Lord's ascension to heaven, some of the disciples 'looked steadfastly toward heaven'. Two men in white apparel, doubtless angels, addressed them and said, "***Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven***" (Acts 1:11).

It has become popular in modernistic circles to regard the Lord's promise to come again as fulfilled in the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). This is manifestly a confusion of Persons. The promise could not be fulfilled in the advent of another Person, but only in the return of the same Person. 'This same Jesus' said

the angels, i.e. the very One the disciples watched ascending into heaven. "***The Lord Himself***", says Paul in 1Thessalonians 4:16. If anyone were to suppose that all the predictions of the Lord's personal return throughout the four Gospels could possibly have been fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, they would have to question their ability to reason with common sense as well as question their theology. Only a rationalist could be so irrational. Besides, what about all the teaching in the Scriptures written after Pentecost, which instructs believers to look for the coming of Christ as a future event? If we were willing to rewrite Scripture and to make it say what we think God should have said, omitting what conflicts with our preconceived opinions (and alas, modernists do not scruple at this) then it might be possible to evade the clear Scripture testimony on this point, but all truly regenerate souls must surely recognise it, unless blinded or confused by some tradition or prejudice.

During the dark ages, the hope of the Lord's coming was all but lost, and many supposed that it was but a figurative representation of death. When few could read, and opportunities for Bible study were limited, such ignorance and confusion were understandable; but they are inexcusable today. At death the believer goes to be with the Lord; the Lord does not come to him (or her). See 2Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23. The two events are to be contrasted, e.g. John 21:21-23. The Lord's coming is not the time of death of the believer, but the time of the resurrection of the believers (1Thess. 4:16,17). The Scriptures which speak of the Lord's coming cannot be made in any way to fit the idea of a spiritual visitation at the time of an individual's death (e.g. Zech. 12:10; 14:3,4; Matt. 24:30; Jude 14,15).

Christ will come 'in like manner' as He was seen to ascend, i.e. visibly and bodily. Every eye will see Him when He descends to earth (Rev. 1:7). The idea of an invisible spiritual 'presence', as taught by at least one false cult, is a manifest perversion of Scripture. To assert, as they do, "According to the Bible, this 'presence' of Christ would not be in human form, but rather, he would be a mighty ruler in heaven", and, "He would be invisibly present as ruler", is to distort the scriptural teaching of the coming of Christ beyond all recognition. His coming will be an 'appearing', a 'revelation', a 'manifestation' (e.g. 1Pet. 1:7,13; 2Thess. 1:7; 2:8), just as much an 'appearing' as the first advent, for of His coming again we read that He shall 'appear the second time' (Hebrews 9:28). The first advent was in humiliation, the second advent will be in glory, but both are personal, visible, bodily visitations of the Son of God. His coming will be an appearing to those who have believed on One they have never seen (1Peter 1:7,8); and when they see Him as He is, they shall be conformed to His likeness, both morally and bodily (1John 3:2; Phil. 3:20,21). Subsequently, He will be manifested to the whole world (Luke 21:26,27; Rev. 1:7), and possibly even to the depths of Hell (Matt. 26:64).

Connected with His coming are two vital works which the Father has put into His hand, namely the resurrection of the dead, and judgement (John 5:19-29).

All men will be raised from the dead, whether believers or unbelievers. For believers it will be a resurrection unto life. This resurrection is selective, like the Lord's own resurrection, an out-resurrection, or a resurrection from among the dead. This is the experience only of those **"that are Christ's"** (1Cor. 15:23). Unbelievers will experience the resurrection of damnation. See Luke 20:35,36;

Acts 24:15; 1Cor. 15:23; 1Thess. 4:16; Revelation Chapter 20.

If all the dead will be raised, so will all men be judged. Those that have not died, but who are still alive when the Lord comes to earth will also be judged (Matt. 25:31-46). The dead will not need to be separated into saved and lost for this is done at death, and the distinction will have been demonstrated in the resurrection. The judgement of the believer will be very different in character from the judgement of the unbeliever, for the judgement due to the believer's sins was borne by Christ upon the cross. Consequently, in this sense he will never come into condemnation [or judgement], for this judgement is past (John 5:24). The believer's judgement will not be judicial and penal, but governmental, not with a view to determining the severity of the eternal punishment due to his sins, but with a view to assessing his service for the Lord. All divine judgements, however, must be characterised by perfect righteousness (Acts 17:31; 2Tim. 4:8). And all will be according to the principle of works (2Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12,13), including, of course, the vital consideration of motives etc, which man cannot properly assess (1Cor. 4:5).

In conclusion we might notice, that the importance of the truth of the Lord's coming to the gospel preached by the apostle Paul, can be readily seen from a study of what are generally regarded as his earliest epistles, those to the Thessalonians. In every single chapter some reference to the coming of Christ in its various aspects can be traced, and the effect of such gospel preaching is powerfully demonstrated in 1Thessalonians 1:9,10.