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THE OBJECT OF OUR LORD'S RETURN.

DISCOURSE NO. 2.

We continue to-day our subject of last Sunday – "The object of our Lord's return." To briefly review: We found that past ages and the present Gospel age have been but steps which God is taking toward the conversion of the world; that although He has not sought directly to bring all men to a knowledge of Himself (which is essential to salvation) but has confined that knowledge to a small proportion of His creatures who were thus elect, or chosen; as for instance the patriarchs of early ages, fleshly Israel of the last or law dispensation, and until the present century to but a small number of earth's millions, even during this Gospel age. Yet, all of this was but a means toward the desired end – "The reconciling of the world unto Himself."

We see that all God's promises center in this Church, now being selected; that she is now as "the body of Christ" filling up the measure of His sufferings, and that when all the members have been selected from the world, and have been "made perfect through suffering," the Church will be joined to Christ Jesus, "whom God gave to be head over the Church, which is His body," or, as expressed in another simile, the "chaste virgin," will be united to the heavenly Bridegroom, and they twain become one, and this one – the Christ complete – is to be the heir of all things.

This new creation (the Christ) we found to be the promised seed which is to "bruise the serpent's head" – crush and destroy evil. So we read, "The very God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet [under Jesus and his church] shortly. This same "seed of Abraham" (which seed is Christ) is the seed "in whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed." "And if ye be Christ's, then are YE Abraham's

seed and heirs." (Gal. 3:29). We found that the end of this age does not close the Church's mission; that though now, while wheat and tares grow together until the harvest, the end of the world (age), her light shines but feebly, yet, when separated from the tares, and exalted with her Lord, then, with him she shall "shine forth as the Sun in the kingdom." This is the "Sun of Righteousness" which "shall arise with healing in his wings."

We glanced at the glory of that Millennial day, wherein "there shall be no more curse," and "the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth," scattering the darkness of sin and ignorance and causing "wars to cease unto the ends of the earth." These are the "times of restitution," of which Peter speaks (Acts 3:17,19), which are due to begin when Christ comes. "For this, the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God." (Rom. 8:22,19)

But let us leave this bright and pleasant picture of the coming day, of which, with the poet, we could say:

"Haste thee along, ages of glory,

Haste the glad time when Christ appears,"

and turning look at a dark picture. While it will be so favorable to those who may live in the "Millennial Age," what about those who have died before the plan of God has thus reached its fulness? During the 6,000 years since creation, there have lived on the earth about 143 billions of human beings. Of these the very broadest estimate that could be made with reason, would be that less than one billion were Saints of God. What of the 142 billions who died out of Christ – what is their condition?

The Atheist answers: They are eternally dead. There is no hereafter; they will never live again.

Calvinism answers: They were not elected to be saved. God foreordained and predestinated them to be lost, to go to hell, and they are there now, writhing in agony, where they will ever remain without hope.

Arminianism answers: We believe that God excuses them on account of ignorance, and that if they did the best they knew how, they are as sure of being a part of the "church of the first born" as is Paul himself.

To this last view the great majority of Christians of all denominations hold from a feeling that any other view would be irreconcilable with justice on God's part.

But, we inquire, What do the Scriptures teach on this last point? – that ignorance is a ground of salvation? No; the only condition known in Scripture is FAITH. "By grace are ye saved through FAITH." Justification by faith is the ground-rock of the whole system of Christianity. When, on the day of Pentecost, Peter was asked, "What must we do to be saved?" He answered: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and be baptized, and thou shalt be saved."

Again, he says (Acts 4:12): "There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved," than the name of Jesus.

Paul reasons that a man must hear the Gospel before he can believe: "How shall they believe on Him of whom they have not heard?" This, God's plan – that men shall be saved on account of faith – Paul says was to the Jew a stumbling block (because they expected salvation as a reward of keeping **[R544 : page 7]** the law), and to the Greeks (the worldly wise) foolishness; but, nevertheless, it has "pleased God by the foolishness (in the eyes of men) of preaching to save them WHICH BELIEVE."

We want to scripturally close you in to the thought, that all who have not heard could not believe, and not believing, could not be a part of the Bride of Christ. And this is not out of harmony with those first two chapters of Romans where Paul teaches that the heathen, having not the law, are a law unto themselves, etc. Many seem to misunderstand Paul, and represent him as teaching that the law which their conscience furnishes is sufficient in some cases to justify them. But this is a great mistake and far from Paul's meaning. Paul's argument everywhere is that "all the world is guilty before God," and that had he not known the law, he had not known sin. For by the law is the knowledge of sin." The law given to the Jew revealed his weakness, and was intended to show him that he was unable to justify himself before God. "For by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his (God's) sight." As the written law thus condemned the Jews, so Paul says it is with the Gentiles also. Though ignorant of The Law they had light enough of conscience to condemn them – not to justify them – and so every mouth is stopped and all the world is proved guilty before God. (Romans 3:19). And when this is realized, eternal life is seen to be "the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord," to every one that believeth.

Well, say some, the Bible to the contrary, I believe and insist that God won't damn the world for ignorance. Now, let us see. Do you practice what you declare? Why do you assist in sending missionaries to the heathen at a cost of thousands of valuable lives and millions of money? If they will all be saved, or even half of them, through ignorance, you do them a positive injury in sending a preacher to tell them of Christ when you know that only about one in a thousand believe when the missionary does go to them. If your idea be correct, it were far better that no missionaries should ever be sent. Before, as you believe, nearly all would have been saved on account of ignorance, but now because of knowledge nearly all will be lost. In the same way we might reason, that if God had left all in ignorance

ALL would have been saved. Then, instead of the gospel being good news, it would be more properly named bad news.

But when this theory is carried to its legitimate consequences, you do not believe it. No, my brethren, you do believe that there is no other name given whereby we must be saved. Your actions speak the loudest – and speak rightly.

Now, suppose we look at things just as God tells us of them and leave the clearing of His character to Himself.

WHAT HAS BECOME OF THE 142 BILLIONS.

First, we answer that you may be sure they are not now in hell suffering, because the Scriptures teach that full and complete reward is not given to any until Christ comes, and He shall reward every man, and the unjust are to receive their deserts then also. Whatever may be their present condition, it cannot be their full reward, for Peter says: "The Lord knoweth how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished," and He is doing so. But the thought of so many of our fellow creatures at any time, being lost, without having had the knowledge which is necessary to salvation, seems terrible indeed to all who have a spark of love or pity. Then, too, there are a number of Scriptures which seem hard to harmonize with all this. Let us see. In the light of his dealings, How shall we understand the statement, "God is Love," or "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish?"

Ah, Lord, it seems to poor, frail humanity that if you loved the world so much, you might have made provision not only that unbelievers might be saved, but also that all might hear and thus have a chance to believe.

Again, we read: "This is the true light, that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." (John 1:9). Lord, all our reason seems

to say, not so, we cannot see how Jesus lighted more than a few of earth's billions. Yonder Hottentot gives no evidence of having been so enlightened, neither did the Sodomites and myriads of others.

Once more we read that Jesus, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man. (Heb. 2:9) How, Lord, we ask? If he tasted death for the one hundred and forty-three billions; and from other causes it becomes efficacious to only one billion, is not his death comparatively a failure?

Again: "Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to ALL people." (Luke 2:10). Surely it is to but few that it has been glad tidings and not to all people.

Another is: "There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, [R545 : page 7] the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all." (1 Tim. 2:5). A ransom, then why should not all have some benefit from Christ's death?

Oh, how dark, how inconsistent do these statements appear, when we remember that the Gospel church is a "little flock." Oh, how we wish it would please God to open our eyes that we might understand the Scriptures, for we feel sure that did we but understand, it must all seem clear. It must all declare in thunder tone "God is Love." Oh, that we had the key! Do you want it? – are you sure you do? It is in the last text we quoted, "Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." (1 Tim. 2:6). Due time, ah, now we see; God has a due time for everything. He could have testified it to this 142 billions in their life time; then that would have been their due time; but as it was not so, their due time must be future. We know that now is your due time and mine, because it is testified to us now. Christ was a ransom for you before you were born, but it was not due time for you to hear it until years after; so with the

Hottentot; Christ was his ransom at the same time that he was yours. He has not heard it yet and may not in this life; but in God's due time he will.

But does not death end probation? one inquires. We answer there is no Scripture which says so, and all the above and many more Scriptures would be meaningless or worse, if death ends all hope to the ignorant masses of the world. A Scripture often quoted to prove this generally entertained view, is: "Where the tree falleth, there it shall be." (Eccl. 11:3). If this has any relation to man and his future it indicates that in whatever condition of knowledge or ignorance he enters death, he remains the same, until he is raised up again.

But, how can knowledge ever reach these billions in their graves? It never will, "for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest." (Eccl. 9:10.) "For in death there is no remembrance of thee (God): in the grave who shall give thee thanks." (Psa. 6:5.) God has provided for the resurrection of them all. For "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (1 Cor. 15:22.) As death came by the first Adam, so life comes by the second Adam. Everything that mankind lost in the first Adam is to be restored in the second: hence the age following Christ's second coming is spoken of as "The times of restitution."

Life is one of the things lost, and is to be one of the things restored. Mark, I do not say eternal life is given them; no, Adam never had eternal life to lose. The continuance of his life was conditioned on his obedience. Life as a human being was lost and this will be restored by the second Adam, and with it the ability to render obedience. This is the general salvation that Christ accomplishes for all, but the "great salvation" which believers receive is entirely different. This enables us to use another text, which is little used except by Universalists, and although we are not

Universalists, yet we claim the right to use all Scripture. It reads: "We trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe." (1 Tim. 4:10.) All men are saved or rescued from the loss entailed on us through Adam, by having all those lost things, including natural life, restored to them. He is also the "especial Saviour of them that believe now – during this age – for they are privileged to become sons of God on a higher than human plane, even to be partakers of the divine nature.

Now we see that "the testimony in due time" explains all of those hitherto troublesome texts. In due time it shall be "good tidings of great joy to all people." In due time that "True Light shall lighten every man that cometh into the world." And in no other way can these Scriptures be used without wresting; we take them to mean just what they say. Paul carries out the line of argument with emphasis in Romans 5:18,19. He reasons that as all men were condemned to death and suffered it, because of Adam's transgression, so also Christ's righteousness justifies all to life again. All lost life, not of our own will or choice, in the first Adam, and all receive life at the hands of the second Adam equally without their will or choice, with the privilege of forever retaining it on specified conditions.

When thus brought to life, and having the love of God testified to them, their probation, their first chance begins, for we do not preach a second chance for any.

But Peter tells us that the restitution is spoken by the mouth of all the holy Prophets. They do all teach it. Ezekiel tells us of the valley of dry bones, "These bones are the whole house of Israel," and God says to them: "I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves and bring you into the land of Israel," (Ezek. 37:11,12.) This agrees with Paul's statement, Rom. 11:25,26. "Blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles, (the Gospel Church, the elect company "taken out of the

Gentiles") be come in, and so all Israel shall be saved," or brought back from their cast-off condition. For "God hath not cast away His people which he foreknew." (Rom. 11:2). They were cut off from His favor while the bride of Christ was being selected, but will return to favor when that work is accomplished – vs. 28 to 33. The prophets are full of statements of how God will plant them again, and they shall be no more plucked up. This does not refer to restorations from former captivities in Babylon, Syria, &c., for the Lord says: In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape and the children's teeth are set on edge; but every man shall die for his own iniquity; every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge." (Jer. 31:29,30.) This is not the case now. You do not die for your own sin but for Adam's. "In Adam all die." He ate the sour grape and our fathers continued to eat them, entailing more sickness and misery upon us all. The day in which "every man shall die for his own iniquity," is this Millennial or Restitution day. But, when restored to the same conditions as Adam, will they not be as liable to sin and fall again as he was? No, they will have learned the lesson which God designed to teach to all during the first 6,000 years, viz: "The exceeding sinfulness of sin." They will be prepared to appreciate the good and shun the evil; and the Gospel church then glorified will be "The kings (rulers) and priests" (teachers) of that new age, for "Unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come; whereof we speak." (Heb. 2:5.)

But are we sure that God intends these blessings for any but the "people whom he foreknew" – the Jews? Yes. He mentions other nations also by name and speaks of their restitution. Let me give you an illustration that will be forcible – the Sodomites. Surely, if I find their restitution mentioned you will be satisfied. But why should they not have an opportunity as well as you, or the Jew, to obtain eternal life? True, they were not righteous, but neither were you when God gave you your opportunity. Christ's own words tell us that they are

not as guilty in His sight as the Jews who had more knowledge: "Woe unto thee...Capernaum, for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day." (Matt. 11:21,23.) Thus Christ's own words teach us that they had not had their full opportunity. Remember Christ says of the Sodomites that "it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all." (Luke 17:29.) So, if their restoration is spoken of, it implies their resurrection. Let us look at the prophecy of Ezek. 16:48 to close. Read it carefully. God here speaks to Israel and compares her with her neighbor Samaria, and also with the Sodomites, whom he says, "I took away as I saw good." (Ezek. 16:50.) Why did God see good to take away these people without giving them a chance of eternal life through the knowledge of "the only name"? Because it was not their due time; they will come to a knowledge of the truth when restored. He will save them from death's bondage first, and then give them knowledge, as it is written: "God will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim. 2:4.) When brought to the knowledge, then, and not until then, are the preparations for Eternal life. With this thought, and with no other, I can understand the dealings of the God of love with those Amalekites and other nations, whom he not only permitted, but commanded Israel to destroy utterly, and leave neither man, woman or child, sparing not even the little ones. How often my heart has ached and yours too, as we sought to reconcile this seeming wantonness on God's part, with the teachings of the new dispensation – "God is love," "Love your enemies," &c. Now we see that the entire Jewish age was a type of the higher Gospel age; Israel's victories and conquests merely pictures of the Christian's battles with sin, etc. These Amalekites and Sodomites and others might just as well die so, as of disease and plague, and it mattered little to them, as they were merely learning to know evil, that when on trial "in due time" they might learn good and be able to discriminate and choose good.

But let us read the prophecy further. After comparing Israel with Sodom and Samaria, and pronouncing them worse, v. 53, says, "When I bring again the captivity (In death all are captives; and Christ came to set at liberty the captives and to open the prison doors of the grave) of Sodom and Samaria, then will I bring thy captives in the midst of them." These will be raised together. In verse 55 this is called a "return to their former estate" – restitution. But some one, who cannot imagine that God really could be so good or just, suggests: God must be speaking ironically to Israel, and saying, He would just as soon bring back the Sodomites as them; but has no notion of either. Let us see; read vs. 60-63: "Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee; I will establish it [R546 : page 7] to thee." Yes; says Paul, "This is God's covenant unto them – they are beloved for the fathers' sake. For the gifts and callings of God are without repentance." (Romans 11:27-29.) The 63d verse concludes the argument, showing that the promised restitution is not based on the merits of either Israel, the Samaritans, or the Sodomites – "That thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee, for all that thou hast done, SAITH THE LORD GOD." When God signs his name to a statement in this way, I must believe it. And no wonder if they are confounded, when "In the ages to come He shows forth the exceeding riches of his grace." (Eph. 2:7.) And many of God's children will be confounded, and amazed also, when they see how "God [R546 : page 8] so loved THE WORLD." They will be ready to exclaim with brother Paul: "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33.)

But some will inquire, how comes it that this has not been seen long ago? We answer, God gives light and knowledge to his people just as it is due. The world was left in almost entire ignorance of God's plan until the Gospel age, when Christ came, bringing life and

immortality TO LIGHT through the Gospel. The Jews up to that time supposed that all the promises of God were to and for them alone, but in due time God showed favor to the Gentiles also. Christians, generally, have supposed that God's blessings are to the church, but we begin to see that God is better than all our fears, and though he has given us the "exceeding great and precious promises," He has made some to the world also.

"The path of the just is as a shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day," and the fact that it now shines so brightly; and that we are able to see more of the beauty and harmony of God's word, is to me a strong presumptive evidence that we are nearing that glorious Millennial Day when we shall know even as we are known. (1 Cor. 13:12.)

But we promised to harmonize those doctrines of the Church generally supposed to be opposed to each other, viz: CALVINISM, or Election; and ARMINIANISM, or Free Grace. Perhaps you already see how they harmonize themselves, by simply recognizing the order of the ages, and applying each text to the place and time to which it belongs. Let me then point out to you

THE INCONSISTENCY OF EITHER CALVINISM OR ARMINIANISM.

when separated from each other. In doing so, I do not wish to reflect on those who hold these doctrines. I shall merely call your attention to features which their warmest advocates must confess to be their weak points.

First – Calvinism says: God is all-wise; He knew the end from the beginning; and as "all his purposes shall be accomplished," He never could have intended to save any but a few – the true Church, the little flock. These He elected, and predestinated to be eternally

saved; all others were equally predestined and elected to go to hell, for, "known unto the Lord are all His works from the foundation of the world."

This has its good features; it shows, and properly, God's Omniscience. This would be our idea of a GREAT God were it not that the three great essential qualities of greatness, viz., MERCY, LOVE and JUSTICE are lacking, for none of these qualities find place in bringing into the world 142 billions of creatures damned before they were born, and mocked by protestations of love. No, no; "God is Love," "God is Just," "God is Merciful."

Second – Arminianism says: Yes, God is love, and in bringing humanity into the world He meant them no harm; only good. But Satan succeeded in tempting Adam; thus "Sin entered into the world and death by sin." And ever since, God has been doing all he can to deliver man from his enemy, even to the giving of His Son. And though now, six thousand years after, the gospel has only reached a very small portion of those creatures, yet, we do hope and trust, that within six thousand years more, through the energy and liberality of the Church, God will have so far remedied the evil introduced by Satan, that all may at least know of his love, and the knowledge of God be co-extensive with the knowledge of evil.

The commendable feature of this view is, that it accepts the statement that "God is Love." But, while full of loving and benevolent designs for His creatures, He lacks ability and foreknowledge adequate to the accomplishment of those designs.

While God was busy arranging and devising for the good of his newly created children, Satan slipped in, and by one stroke, upset all God's plans, and in one moment brought sin and evil among men to such an extent that even by exhausting all his power, God must spend twelve thousand years to even reinstate righteousness to such a degree that man will have an opportunity to choose good as readily

as evil; and the one hundred and forty-two billions of the past six thousand years, and as many more of the next, are lost to all eternity, in spite of God's love for them, because Satan interfered with his plans as God had not foreseen. Thus Satan gets, in spite of God, one hundred into hell to one God gets to glory. This view must exalt men's ideas of Satan, and lower their estimation of Him who "spake and it was done; commanded and it stood fast."

But how refreshing it is for us to turn from these fragments of truth, as separately considered, and see how harmonious and beautiful they are when united; how, during the present and past ages, God is electing, or gathering, by the preaching of His word the Gospel church; how he wisely permitted evil to come into the world in order that He might develop His church, which, thus being made perfect through suffering, might be prepared for her gracious work in the future; and how the mass of mankind, though not now on probation, are nevertheless getting a knowledge and experience, by contact with sin, which he foresaw they would be the better of. And, furthermore, how he took occasion, in connection with this, His plan, to show us His great love, by so arranging that the death of Christ was necessary to our recovery from sin, and then freely giving Him to be "the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world," and then in the next dispensation – "The new heavens and earth," (Rev. 21:1-9-10 and 22:17.) "The spirit and the bride say come, and whosoever will may come and take of the water of life freely." Then "Free Grace" will be shown in the fullest measure. This is the teaching of God's word. Men would not have thought of such a glorious plan of salvation. Truly God has said: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways: For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isa. 55:8,9.) Hereafter when we address "Our Father," may it call to our mind that His love and compassion are far greater than the pity of earthly

parents; and while we study His word more and more, and seek to "grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of God, let us ever remember that

"Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter
And He will make it plain."

Having seen how much of the great plan of God awaits the coming of Christ for its accomplishment, and having, we trust, found why Christ comes, we will next Sunday take up another branch of truth connected therewith, and inquire the teaching of Scripture as to the judgment of the Church, and of the World, the reward of Faith and that of Works.
