

[R2196 : page 229]

"I WILL COME AGAIN AND RECEIVE YOU."

– AUGUST 8. – 1 THESS. 4:9-5:2. –

WHILE our lesson deals chiefly with the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is introduced with a description of the class who will rejoice in his second coming, and with good reason. The Apostle (vs. 9-12) points out some of the true characteristics of those to whom he elsewhere says, "Ye, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief; ye are all children of the light, and children of the day."

An essential of Christian character is "the love of [R2196 : page 230] God," "the love of Christ," extending to all the household of faith possessed of his spirit; and a spirit of sympathy toward the entire "groaning creation."

Although the Church at Thessalonica was composed of those who in respect to length of Christian experience were but "babes in Christ," yet very evidently the persecution which had come upon them had caused them to grow very rapidly. It was but a year since they had received the gospel, and yet the Apostle witnesses to their rapid development, as evidenced by their love one for the other; and not only love for the company at Thessalonica, but the breadth of their love extending to and manifesting an interest in all of the household of faith throughout the Province of Macedonia. The Apostle declares that this love of the brethren was a manifestation of the fact that they had been "taught of God." This reminds us of the statement of another apostle, "He that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen."

One of the first effects of a knowledge of the grace of God in Christ, and of a full, thorough consecration to the Lord, is this love for all fellow-servants – "brethren." Would that the fervency and zeal of

first love, both toward the Lord and toward the entire household of faith, might not only continue, but increase with all. But alas! many who start warmly and earnestly grow lukewarm – become captious, cynical, hypercritical, high-minded and self-assertive – and lose much of the simplicity, zeal and humility of their first faith and first love. This is the first attack of the great adversary through the weaknesses of the flesh, to re-ensnare those who have escaped his chains of darkness, and gotten to see some of the glory of God shining through Christ. If they do not resist these temptations, the effect is sure to be not only lukewarmness toward the Lord and his cause and the members of his body, but eventually the cultivation of the fruits of darkness, envy, malice, hatred, strife, instead of the fruits of the spirit of Christ, meekness, gentleness, patience, brotherly love and kindness. Hence, the Apostle urges the Church, "We beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more," in love and service one for the other, which imply a growth in all the graces of the Spirit.

The expression "that ye study to be quiet" might be rendered literally "that ye be ambitious to be quiet," or that ye have a quiet ambition – not a restless bustling for notoriety and great exploits, but a quiet earnest perseverance in well-doing; in which condition the fruits and graces of the Spirit thrive best. They were to be ambitious also to attend to their own affairs, and to work with their own hands: home and family duties were not to be neglected. The religion of Christ is designed to enter into and blend with all the proper duties, perplexities, trials and pleasures of the home and family; and thus the majority can best let shine the light which they have received from the Lord.

True, the light received will make a great change in many of the affairs of the home. It sets before us new ideals to be esteemed and to be copied. It introduces us to a new relationship, a new kindred – the family of God – and thus brings some new responsibilities and privileges. And if filled with the spirit of the truth, with love toward God and all who have any of his likeness, it will make us very zealous in the dispensing of the grace of God, which has brought so much

blessing to our own hearts. But, we should not consider it necessarily the Lord's will that we all should go forth as public teachers, abandoning entirely our homes, trades, duties, responsibilities, etc.

The Lord's call will never conflict with proper duties and responsibilities previously upon us. The man or the woman who has a family to provide for should not think of leaving such obligations, nor consider himself called to public preaching, if it would imply the neglect of duties and obligations already resting upon him. He or she, however, should quietly and thankfully be ambitious to do all in the Divine service that a proper regard for others dependent upon them would permit. On the other hand, those who are free to give time and energy to the Lord's service, and who have talents, should when they receive the truth, humbly present their all to the Lord and seek to use their every opportunity in his service as he shall open the way; and such consecrated ones should be very careful that they do not encumber themselves so as to hinder usefulness in such service.

Not only have we duties and a ministry toward every member of the body of Christ, but (v. 12) we have certain responsibilities toward those who are without – in darkness, out of Christ. The Christian is to be a burning and shining light toward the world. The world sees not from the inside, as does the household of faith, but merely from the outside; hence the necessity that Christians should so live before the world as to be "living epistles, known and read of all men," honoring to the Lord and to the teachings of his Word. The Apostle's statement really is "walk honorably toward them that are without." The Christian life should be seen by the world, not merely as just and honest, but also as noble and honorable. There are honest people who are mean, truthful people who tell the truth in a combative and repellant manner; in the true Christian, love should produce so generous a sentiment as would ennoble every virtue. In other words, as the same Apostle expressed it, "He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity (without ostentation)"; "he that ruleth, with diligence"; "he that showeth **[R2196 : page 231]** mercy, with cheerfulness," etc., Rom. 12:7-20.

To this end, also, the Christian should strive "to have need of nothing" – So far as possible not to be dependent upon charity – but, rather, as the Apostle elsewhere states it, in harmony with the foregoing, he should "labor, working with his hands at useful employment [not to accumulate great wealth, but] that he may have to give to him that needeth." (Eph. 4:28.) The Lord's instruction to fleshly Israel that they should lend, but should not borrow, may well be applied in principle by spiritual Israel. And this principle applies to buying on credit; which should be avoided by the Lord's people, and as a rule would be found advantageous **[R2197 : page 231]** to mankind in general.

"THEM THAT SLEEP IN JESUS."

Having given us some general idea respecting the brethren, their general character, etc., the Apostle proceeds to speak of their hopes. Under the Apostle's instruction, supplemented by Timothy's, the Church at Thessalonica had in a very short time attained a considerable knowledge of the Divine plan; much more apparently than is enjoyed by a majority of Christian congregations to-day. For instance, (1) They knew what many to-day are ignorant of, that their hope centered in the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and their being gathered to him then. (2) They knew that their friends who had died were "asleep," and their hope was that they would be awakened from the sleep of death by the Lord at his second coming. Realizing that all hopes of eternal life depended upon the second coming of the Lord as the great Life-giver, there was no danger that the early Church should ever lose sight of this inspiring hope set before us in the gospel. And it is because this fact (that the dead "sleep" and cannot be awakened until the second advent) has been lost sight of for several centuries past, that faith in and hope for the Lord's second coming has so generally languished. It has come to be generally believed by Christian people that the dead do not "sleep," but are more awake than they ever were – that they go to heaven or to hell in the moment of dissolution; and that these conditions are permanent, unalterable. With such unscriptural thoughts

before their minds, who can wonder that to them the second coming of the Lord is an event without special interest; and hence regarded lightly, and by many wholly disbelieved, and declared to be a useless, uninteresting and pernicious faith.

However, "the brethren," who have been instructed by the Word of the Lord, and who do not follow "cunningly devised fables" originated by the deceiver, find that the Scriptures as a whole from Genesis to Revelation are illuminated with the grand hope of the coming of Messiah in glory and power, to establish his kingdom of righteousness in the earth, and to awaken and lift up those who have fallen under the hand of death; to give beauty for ashes, and the oil of joy for the spirit of heaviness – to as many as will accept his blessing, under the terms of the New Covenant sealed at Calvary with his own precious blood.

The penalty against our race, as originally pronounced, was not a sleep of death, for a few days or for a few centuries; on the contrary, it was absolute death – destruction. But God had purposed a redemption from the curse of death, and for this purpose Christ Jesus came into the world and died, the just one for the unjust, that he might bring us to God – back to Divine favor, where the gift of God, eternal life, will be a possibility to the obedient. Ever since the ransom-price was paid at Calvary, and its acceptance manifested at Pentecost, it has been proper to regard the whole world as being no longer dead – wholly cut off from life – but as merely sleeping – waiting for the return of the Redeemer as the Awakener, Vivifier, Life-giver.

In this sense of the word, all mankind, redeemed by the precious blood, may be said to "sleep in Jesus"; because, by his death Jesus bought the world, and secured for all another trial for life (instead of the one lost by father Adam through disobedience). And Jesus himself declared that as a consequence of his being lifted up as the great sin-offering upon the cross, he will yet "draw" all men unto him – thus showing that the world is not to be considered as dead, extinct, but as

merely "asleep," waiting for the drawing time foreordained of the Father, and provided for by the ransom for all. This drawing, like the drawing exerted for the selection of the Church, will be through a knowledge of the truth, and signifies that all mankind will ultimately be made aware of God's gracious provision, under which if they will (when brought to a knowledge of the truth), they may obtain life everlasting. Since the majority of mankind went into death before the ransom was paid, this implies an awakening from death in order that they may be drawn or come to a knowledge of the truth. In harmony with this are the words of our Lord, that the hour is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and come forth; and then they that hear (obey) shall live (everlastingly).

All have been redeemed by Jesus, who "gave his life a ransom for all"; and the fact that their death-sentence has been met, paid by the Redeemer, makes it proper that they may now be spoken of as "asleep in Jesus," instead of as being dead in Adam. The fact that many of them did not know of their redemption would work no greater hindrance than the fact that many of the same ones had no knowledge in particular of the original [R2197 : page 232] sentence through Adam – they came under Adamic sentence without choice or knowledge, and latterly came under the benefits of the redemption similarly without choice or knowledge – Rom. 5:18.

That the Apostle in this connection in the use of the words "them also which sleep in Jesus," does not refer merely to the saints is very evident, when we remember that the gospel had only been preached at Thessalonica for one year, and that in that year not very many of the saints could have died. When we remember further that the saints are not very generally related, according to the flesh, we can readily see that in appealing to their hopes that they should sorrow not as others, the Apostle must have meant not only hopes for the saints, but also hopes for all of their friends who died – including those who had previously died. If their hopes were merely for the saints, and if they believed that all others were hopelessly and everlastingly lost, it would

be in vain that the Apostle would appeal to them not to sorrow as others who have no hope; for, such bad hopes respecting the great majority of their dying and dead friends and relatives would be a cause for more sorrow than they or any other heathens could have had when they had no knowledge, and no definite hopes.

This is set forth by the Apostle (v. 14): he points out that our faith is built upon the fact, (1) that Christ died; and (2) that he rose again. He died for our sins, "and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). His resurrection is an evidence that his sacrifice was acceptable on behalf not only of his Church, but also on behalf of all for whom he died; and it becomes a guarantee or pledge, not only of God's gracious proposition, that he will in his own due time establish Christ and his Church as his kingdom, but a guarantee, also, of the further promise that Christ's kingdom when established shall "bless all the families of the earth," with "the knowledge of the truth." Believing this, we are bound to believe also that all who were redeemed by his precious blood shall, according to his promise, yet come forth from the sleep of death to hear his Word as the great Law-giver of the new dispensation; and by obedience to it, under the New Covenant, sealed by the precious blood, to have if they will the gift of God, eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. (See Acts 3:22,23.) As God accepted the sacrifice of Christ and raised him from the dead, even so, them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring [from the sleep of death] with him – through his instrumentality.

But let us not confound this thought of the future of the whole world being changed from "death" to "sleep" by the ransom which Jesus gave for all, with the very different expression "new creatures in Christ," and "the dead in Christ," expressions which are applicable to the elect Church only.

IN JESUS, VS. IN CHRIST.

Many will notice at a glance that the name Jesus, which signifies Saviour, has special applicability to the ransom and restitution features

of our Lord's work, while the name Christ is the title of his kingly office. The call to "be baptized into Jesus Christ" (the anointed) is an offer which is restricted to the "called and chosen and faithful," "elect" Church of this Gospel age; but the redemptive benefits covered by the name Jesus are "for all," for "every man," for "whosoever will" accept those mercies on New Covenant conditions.

So, then, in the language of the Apostle, we exhort Christians that in respect to all their dead, in Christ and out of Christ – new creatures and old creatures, those enlightened and blessed by the marvelous light of the gospel, and those who have died while yet blinded to the truth by "the god of this world," that they sorrow not as others who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died for all, and that he has risen, and that all the dead on this account are to be reckoned as sleeping, waiting for his return and his exaltation with his elect bride in glory; and that then all whom God counts as asleep in or on account of or through him and his work, shall be also brought from the dead.

And few have noticed the frequency with which the Scriptures use this word "sleep." Notice that it is used three times in three successive verses in this lesson. Notice also the following instances: Jno. 11:11,12; Acts 7:60; 13:13,36; 2 Peter 3:4; 1 Cor. 15:6,13-18,20,51; Matt. 9:24; 13:25; 25:5; Mark 5:39; Luke 8:52; 1 Thess. 5:10; Matt. 27:52; 1 Cor. 11:30.

These instances of the use of the word sleep, instead of the word death, are all from the New Testament, and used in full view of the ransom by which all were redeemed from the Adamic sentence, and a majority of them after the sacrifice had been given. What was the custom previously? Looking back we find Daniel (12:1-3) prophetically speaking of those who "sleep in the dust of the earth," and describing **[R2198 : page 232]** the sleepers as of two classes – some who will awake to everlasting life, and some to shame – the latter representing those whose trial will take place during the Millennium.

And similarly of the kings and prophets one after another, good and bad, it is declared he "slept with his fathers."

The basis for this expression and of the faith in a future life which it implied is explained by our Lord saying, "That the dead are [to be] raised, even Moses showed at the bush" (Luke 20:37). "Have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him [R2198 : page 233] saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Mark 12:26). "He is not a God of the dead [the extinct, for whom no future is designed] but [he is the God] of the living, because all live unto him" (Luke 20:38). It was as a result of this lesson the Jews thereafter spoke of their dead as "asleep," and "waiting for the morning" to be "awakened." And, be it noticed, God's grounds for speaking of humanity as yet having a hope of life beyond the grave, rests not upon any change of the sentence from death (extinction) to a profound "sleep" for a period, but upon his predetermined plan to provide a Savior who would redeem or purchase back for Adam and all his race "that which was lost" of privilege of life everlasting in harmony with God.

If, then, sentence of death which came upon all men by Adam's transgression is changed to a sleep, through whom came the change? We answer, It is in or through Jesus that they may now be said to sleep; because his sacrifice is the ground for the expression "sleep."

Having spoken of the general hopes of the entire "groaning creation" which all centre in the second coming of our Lord, the Apostle delivers, not an opinion or a guess, but a special message, to the effect that the sleeping saints will suffer no less by reason of having fallen asleep, but that, on the contrary, they will be granted a priority over the living saints, in that they will be "changed," "glorified," be like and see the Lord, and share his glory, before those of the same class who are alive at that time. Elsewhere we have given at considerable length our reasons for believing that the shout, the voice and the trumpet here mentioned by the Apostle are symbols, as in other parts

of the Scriptures – for instance, the shouts, voices and trumpets of Revelation, connected with the same topic. See Millennial Dawn, Vol. II., chapter V., particularly pages 143-150.

It would appear that the Church at Thessalonica had been studying this subject of the Lord's second coming, and were fearful lest some of them might "fall asleep" before his coming, and were doubtful as to how much of the blessing might thus be lost by them, as well as solicitous for their friends, hence the Apostle says, "Comfort one another" with these words.

We here notice that the word coming in verse fifteen is in the Greek parousia, which really does not have the significance of our English word "coming," but instead signifies presence – after arrival – giving the thought that the Lord will be present before the dead in Christ are "raised," although that will be prior to the "change" of the living. This, as well as many other Scriptures, indicate distinctly that the Lord's presence will not be manifest, visible, to the world during this time; as our Lord said before he went away, "Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more." This thought is emphasized by the Apostle's subsequent remarks respecting the day of the Lord, and the fact that the world would not know of it, but only the "brethren" who were "not in darkness."

It speaks well for the rapid growth in knowledge on the part of the Church at Thessalonica that the Apostle could say to them, "Of the times and seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write unto you: for yourselves know perfectly, that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night; and when they [the world, unbelievers] shall say, Peace and safety! then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape; but, "ye brethren, are not in darkness that that day shall overtake you as a thief." How definitely the Apostle here separates the body of Christ, the Church, from the world; and how particularly he shows that the one class may, will, must have knowledge on this subject, while the other class must

be in ignorance on the same subject. And that subject is a knowledge of the day of the Lord – the day of the Lord's presence – "the harvest" or end of this age, in which the great Chief Reaper will not only gather the sleeping ones first, but proceed also to seal and to gather all the living ones of the elect class, who shall be accounted worthy to escape the great things that are about to come upon the world, in the great time of trouble which will dissolve present institutions and make ready for the establishment of Christ and his little flock of joint-heirs, as the heavenly kingdom.
