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COMMENTARY

**DARBY'S SYNOPSIS OF THE
BOOKS OF THE BIBLE
PART 2: NEW TESTAMENT**

by John Nelson Darby

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John Nelson Darby, 1800-1882

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1 THESSALONIANS

We find in the epistles to the Thessalonians, and especially the first (for in the second it was already needful to guard that freshness from the perfidious attacks of the enemy), the condition and the hope of the Christian as such in this world all its freshness. These two epistles are the first that Paul wrote, unless we except that to the Galatians, the date of which is uncertain. Already long occupied with the work, it is only when this work was considerably advanced, that in watching over it he guards it by means of his writings — writings as we have seen, various in character, according to the state of the churches, and according to the divine wisdom which, by this means, deposited in the scriptures that which would be necessary for all ages.

Newly converted, the Christians at Thessalonica suffered much from the persecution of the world — a persecution which the Jews of that place had already previously stirred up against Paul himself. Happy at the gracious work there, and rejoicing in the state of his dear children in the faith (a testimony to which was born everywhere, even by the world), the apostle opens his heart; and the Holy Ghost sets forth by his mouth what that christian condition was upon the earth which was the source of his joy in the case of the Thessalonians; and what the hope which threw its light upon the believer's existence, shining around him through his whole life, and illuminating his path in the wilderness. In a word the christian character is unfolded to our eyes with all its motives and its joys, and that in connection with the testimony of God and the hope which is our strength in bearing it.

We all know that the doctrine of the coming of Christ, which universally accompanies the work of the Spirit that attaches our hearts to Him in the first spring of a new life, is specially presented to us in these two epistles. And it is not merely formally taught as a doctrine; it is linked with every spiritual relationship of our souls, it is displayed in all the circumstances of the Christian's life. We are converted in order to wait for Him. The joy of the saints in the fruits of their labors is realised in His presence. It is at the coming of Christ that holiness has all its value, its measure being seen

in that which is then manifested. It is the consolation when Christians die. It is the unexpected judgment of the world. It is unto the coming of Christ that God preserves His own in holiness, and blameless. We shall see these points set forth in detail in the different chapters of the first epistle. We only point them out here. In general we shall find that personal relationships, and the expectation of His appearing, have a remarkable and enlivening freshness in this epistle in every respect. The Lord is present to the heart — is its object; and christian affections spring up in the soul, causing the fruits of the Spirit to abound.

In these two epistles only is an assembly said to be “in God the Father,” that is to say, planted in this relationship, having its moral existence — its mode of being — in it. The life of the assembly developed itself in the communion that flowed from this relationship. The Spirit of adoption characterises it. With the affection of little children the Thessalonians knew the Father. Thus John says, when speaking of the little children in Christ, “I write unto you because ye have known the Father.” It is the first introduction into the position of liberty in which Christ has placed us — liberty before God and in communion with Him. Precious position! to be as children to One who loves as a Father, with all the liberty and tender affection of that relationship, according to divine perfection. For here it is not the adaptation of Christ’s human experience to the wants in which He acquired it (precious as that grace is); it is our introduction into the unmingled enjoyment of the light, and of the divine affections displayed in the character of the Father. It is our communion, tender and confiding but pure, with Him whose love is the source of all blessing. Nor do I doubt that, freshly brought out of heathenism as the Thessalonians were, the apostle refers to their knowledge of the one true God the Father in contrast with their idols.

The apostle, in declaring (as was his custom) that which he felt respecting them — the aspect in which they appeared to his heart and mind, speaks neither of gifts, as to the Corinthians, nor of the grand features of an exaltation that embraced the Lord and all saints, as to the Ephesians and even to the Colossians (with the addition of that which their state required); nor of the brotherly affection and fellowship of love which the Philippians had manifested in their connection with himself; nor of a faith that existed apart from his labors, and in communion with which he hoped

to refresh himself, adding to it that which is abundant gifts enabled him to impart to them, as he writes to the Romans whom he had not yet seen.

Here it is the life itself of the Christian in its first fresh impressions, in its intrinsic qualities, as it developed itself by the energy of the Holy Ghost on earth, the life of God here below in them, which he remembers in his prayers with so much satisfaction and joy. Three great principles, he tells the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 13) form the basis, and ever abide as the foundation of this life — faith, hope and love. Now these three were the powerful and divine motives of the life of the Thessalonians. This life was not merely a habit; it flowed, in its outward activities, from immediate communion with its source. These activities were quickened and maintained by divine life, and by keeping the eye constantly fixed upon the object of faith. There was work, and labor, and endurance. There were the same in Ephesus, as we see it in Revelation 2. But here it was a work of faith, labor undertaken by love, endurance fed by hope. Faith, hope, and love are, we have seen, the springs of Christianity in this world. The work, the labor, the endurance continued at Ephesus, but ceased to be characterised by these great and mighty principles. The habit continued, but the communion was wanting. They had forsaken their first love.

The first to the Thessalonians is the expression of the living power in which the assembly is planted: Ephesus, in Revelation 2, of its first departure from that state.

May our work be a work of faith, drawing its strength, its existence even, from our communion with God our Father! May it be, each moment, the fruit of the realisation of that which is invisible, of the life which lives in the certainty, the immutable certainty, of the word! May it thus bear the impress of the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, and be a testimony to it.

May our labor in service be the fruit of love, not performed merely as duty and obligation, although it is this, if we know that it is before us to be done!

May the patience that we must have, in order to go through this wilderness, be, not the necessity we feel because the path is before us, but

an endurance sustained by the hope that belongs to our view of Jesus by faith, and that is waiting for Him!

These principles, faith, hope, and love, form our character as Christians:* but it cannot, and ought not to, be formed in us without having objects. Accordingly the Spirit presents them here. They have a twofold character. The heart rests by faith in Jesus, waits for Him, counts upon Him, links itself with Him in its walk. He has walked here below, He represents us in heaven, He watches over us as the good Shepherd. He loves His own; He nourishes and cherishes them: our faith and our hope keep Him always in view. The conscience is before God our Father; it is not in the spirit of fear: there is no uncertainty as to our relationship. We are the children of a Father who loves us perfectly; but we are before God. His light has authority and power in the conscience: we walk in the sense that His eye is upon us, in love but upon us. And light makes everything manifest. It judges all that might weaken the sweet and peaceful realisation of the presence of God, and our communion with Jesus, and our confidence in Him, the intimacy of the intercourse between our souls and the Lord. These two principles are of all importance for abiding peace, for the progress of our souls. Without them the soul flags. The one sustains confidence, the other keeps us in the light with a good conscience. Without the latter, faith (not to say more) loses its liveliness; without the former, the conscience becomes legal, and we lose spiritual strength, light and ardor.

[* They are found oftener in Paul's writings than is thought; as 1 Thessalonians 5:8, and Colossians 1:4, 5. In 2 Thessalonians 1:3 we have faith and love, but he has to clear up their thoughts as to hope.]

The apostle reminds them also of the means used by God to produce this condition, that is, the gospel, the word, brought in power and in much assurance to the soul by the Holy Ghost. The word had power in their heart — came to it as the word of God; the Spirit Himself revealed Himself in it, giving the consciousness of His presence; and the consequence of this was the full assurance of the truth in all its power, in all its reality. The apostle's life, his whole conduct, confirmed the testimony which he boreformed a part of it. Accordingly (it is always the case) the fruit of his labors answered in character to him who labored; the Christianity of the Thessalonians resembled that of Paul. It was like the walk of the Lord

Himself whom Paul followed so closely. It was “in much affliction,” for the enemy could not bear so plain a testimony, and God granted this grace to such a testimony, and “with joy of the Holy Ghost.”

Happy testimony to the power of the Spirit working in the heart! When this is so, everything becomes testimony to others. They see that there is in Christians a power of which they are ignorant, motives which they have not experienced, a joy which they may scoff at but which they do not possess; a conduct which strikes them, and which they admire, although they do not follow it; a patience which shows the impotence of the enemy in striving against a power that endures everything, and that rejoices in spite of all his efforts. What can we do with those who allow themselves to be killed without becoming less joyful, nay, whom it makes more so; who are above all our motives when left to themselves, and who, if oppressed, possess their souls in perfect joy in spite of all our opposition; and who are unconquered by torments, finding in these only an occasion for bearing a stronger testimony that Christians are beyond our power? At peace, life is all of it a testimony; death, even in torture, is still more so. Such is the Christian, where Christianity exists in its true power, in its normal condition according to God — the word (of the gospel) and the presence of the Spirit, reproduced in the life, in a world estranged from God.

Thus it was with the Thessalonians; and the world, in spite of itself, became an additional witness to the power of the gospel. An ensample to believers in other places, they were the subject of report and conversation to the world, which was never weary of discussing this phenomenon, so new and so strange, of people who had given up all that governed the human heart, all to which it was subject, and worshipped one only living and true God, to whom even the natural conscience bore testimony. The gods of the heathen were the gods of the passions, not of the conscience. And this gave a living reality, an actuality, to the position of Christians and to their religion. They waited for His Son from heaven.

Happy indeed were those Christians whose walk and whole existence made of the world itself a witness for the truth, who were so distinct in their confession, so consistent in their life, that an apostle did not need to

speak of that which he had preached, of that which he had been among them. The world spoke of it for him and for them.

A few words on the testimony itself, which, simple as it may be, is of great importance, and contains principles of great moral depth. It forms the basis of the whole life, and of all the christian affections also, that are unfolded in the epistle, which, besides this development, contains only a special revelation of the circumstances and the order of the coming of Christ to call His people to Himself, and of the difference between that event and the day of the Lord to judge the world, although this latter follows on the former.

That which the apostle points out, as the testimony born by the faithful walk of the Thessalonians, contained three principal subjects: 1st, they had forsaken their idols to serve the living and true God; 2nd, they were waiting for His Son from heaven, whom He had raised from among the dead; 3rd, the Son was a safeguard from the wrath which was to be revealed.

An immense fact — simple but of vast import — characterises Christianity. It gives us a positive object; and this object is nothing less than God Himself. Human nature may discover the folly of that which is false. We scorn false gods and graven images; but we cannot get beyond ourselves, we cannot reveal anything to ourselves. One of the most renowned names of antiquity is pleased to tell us, that all would go well if men followed nature (it is manifest that they could not rise above it); and, if fact, he would be in the right if man were not fallen. But to require man to follow nature is a proof that he is fallen, that he has degraded himself below the normal state of that nature. He does not follow it in the walk that suits its constitution. All is in disorder. Self-will carries him away and acts in his passions. Man has forsaken God, and has lost the power and center of attraction that kept him in his place and everything in his own nature in its place. Man cannot recover himself, he cannot direct himself; for, apart from God, there is nothing but self-will that guides man. There are many objects that furnish occasion for the acting of the passions and the will; but there is no object which, as a center, gives him a regular, constant, and durable moral position in relationship with that object, so that his character should bear its stamp and value. Man must either have a

moral center, capable of forming him as a moral being, by attracting him to itself and filling his affections, so that he shall be the reflex of that object; or he must act in self-will, and then he is the sport of his passions; or, which is the necessary consequence, he is the slave of any object that takes possession of his will. A creature, who is a moral being, cannot subsist without an object. To be self-sufficing is the characteristic of God.

The equilibrium which subsisted in the unconsciousness of good and evil is lost. Man no longer walks as man, having nothing in his mind outside his normal condition, outside that which he possessed; not having a will, or, which comes to the same thing, having a will that desired nothing more than it possessed, but that gratefully enjoyed all that was already appropriated to its nature, and especially the companionship of a being like himself, a help who had his own nature, and who answered to his heartblessing God for everything.

Now man wills. While he has lost that which formed the sphere of his enjoyment, there is in him an activity which seeks, which is become unable to rest without aiming at, something farther; which, has already, as will, thrown itself into a sphere that it does not fill, in which it lacks intelligence to apprehend all that is there and power to realise even that which it desires. Man, and all that has been his, no longer suffices man as enjoyment. He still needs an object. This object will either be above or below the man. If it be below, he degrades himself below himself; and it is this indeed which has taken place. He no longer lives according even to nature (as he to whom I have alluded says), a state which the apostle has described in the beginning of the epistle to the Romans with all the horrors of the plain truth. If this object be above himself and below God, there is still nothing to govern his nature, nothing that puts him morally in his place. A good being could not take this place to exclude God from it. If a bad object gains it, he becomes to the man a God, who shuts out the true God, and degrades man in his highest relationship — the worst of all degradations. This too has taken place. And since these beings are but creatures, they only can govern man by that which exists, and by that which acts upon him. This is to say, they are the gods of his passions. They degrade the idea of the Divinity: they degrade the practical life of humanity into slavery to the passions (which are never satisfied, and which invent evil when they are surfeited with excess in that which is

natural to them) and are thus left without resource. Such in fact was the condition of man under Paganism.

Man, and above all, man having knowledge of good and evil, should have God for his object; and as an object that his heart can entertain with pleasure, and on which his affections can be exercised: otherwise he is lost. The gospel — Christianity — has given him this. God, who fills all things, who is the source of, in whom is centered, all blessing, all good — God, who is all love, who has all power, who embraces everything in His knowledge, because everything (except the forsaking of Himself) is but the fruit of His mind and will — God has revealed Himself in Christ to man, in order that his heart, occupied with Him, with perfect confidence in His goodness, may know Him, may enjoy His presence? and reflect His character.

The sin and misery of man have but lent occasion to an infinitely more complete development of what this God is, and of the perfection of His nature, in love, in wisdom, and in power. But we are here considering only the fact, that He has given Himself to man for an object. Nevertheless, although the misery of man has but given room for a much more admirable revelation of God, yet God Himself must have an object worthy of Himself to be the subject of His purposes, and in order to unfold all His affections. This object is the glory of His Son — His Son Himself. A being of an inferior nature could not have been this to Him, although God can glorify Himself in His grace to such a one. The object of the affections, and the affections that are exercised with regard to it, are necessarily correlative. Thus God has displayed His sovereign and immense grace with regard to that which was the most wretched the most unworthy, the most necessitous; and He has displayed all the majesty of His being, all the excellence of His nature, in connection with an object in whom He could find all His delight, and exhibit all that He is in the glory of His nature. But it is as man — marvelous truth in the eternal counsels of God! — that this object of God the Father's delight has taken His place in this glorious revelation by which God makes Himself known to His creatures. God has ordained and prepared man for this. Thus the heart that is taught by the Spirit knows God as revealed in this immense grace, in the love that comes down from the throne of God to the ruin and misery of the sinner; he finds himself, in Christ, in the knowledge and in the enjoyment of the love which

God has for the object of His eternal delight, who also is worthy of being so; of the communications by which He testifies that love (John 17:7, 8); and finally, of the glory which is its public demonstration before the universe. This latter part of our ineffable blessedness is the subject of Christ's communications at the end of John's Gospel (chaps. 14, 16, and, in particular 17).*

[* Compare Proverbs 8:30, 31 and Luke 2:14, where read, "good pleasure in men." It is beautiful to see the angels unjealously celebrating it. Love downwards in grace is great according to the misery and unworthiness of the object; upwards as the affection of the soul according to the worthiness; see both in Christ, Ephesians 5:2. In both in Christ self is wholly given up. He gave, not sought, Himself. The law takes self as measure as to the neighbor, and supposes him on the same footing. There is no love downwards.]

From the moment that the sinner is converted and believes the gospel, and (to complete his state, I must add) is sealed with the Holy Ghost, now that the blessed Lord has wrought I redemption, he is introduced — as to the principle of his life — into this position, into these relationships with God. He is perhaps but a child; but the Father whom he knows, the love into which he has entered, the Savior on whom his eyes are opened, are the same whom he will enjoy when he shall know as he is known. He is a Christian; he is turned from idols to God, and to wait for His Son from heaven.

We may observe, that the subject here is not the power which converts, nor the source of life. Of these other passages speak clearly. Here it is the character of the life in its manifestation. Now this depends on its objects. Life is exercised and unfolded in connection with its objects, and thus characterises itself. The source from which it flows makes it capable of enjoying it; but an intrinsic life which has no object on which it depends is not the life of a creature. Such life as that is the prerogative of God. This shows the folly of those who would have a subjective life, as they say, without its having a positively objective character; for this subjective state depends on the object with which it is occupied. It is the characteristic of God to be the source of His own thoughts without an object — to be, and to be self-sufficing (because He is perfection, and the center and source of everything), and to create objects unto Himself, if He would have any without Himself. In a word, although receiving a life from God which is

capable of enjoying Him, the moral character of man cannot be formed in him without an object that imparts it to him.

Now God has given Himself to us for an object, and has revealed Himself in Christ. If we occupy ourselves with God in Himself (supposing always that He had thus revealed Himself), the subject is too vast. It is an infinite joy; but in that which is simply infinite there is something wanting to a creature, although it is his highest prerogative to enjoy it. It is necessary to him on the one hand, in order that he may be in his place, and that God may have His place in regard to him, and on the other hand that which exalts him so admirably. It must be so; and it is the privilege given unto us, and given unto us in a priceless intimacy, for we are children, and we dwell in God, and God in us; but with this in itself there is a certain weight upon the heart in the sense of God alone. We read of “a far more exceeding and abundant weight* of glory.” It must be so: His majesty must be maintained when we think of Him as God, His authority over the conscience. The heart — God has so formed it — needs something which will not lower its affections, but which may have the character of companion and friend, at least to which it has access in that character.

[* Weight and glory are the same word in Hebrew.]

It is this which we have in Christ, our precious Savior. He is an object near to us. He is not ashamed to call us brethren. He has called us friends; all that He has heard from His Father He has made known to us. Is He then a means of our eyes being turned away from God? On the contrary, it is in Him that God is manifested, in Him that even the angels see God. It is He who, being in the bosom of the Father, reveals to us His God and Father in this sweet relationship, and as He knows Him Himself. And not only this, but He is in the Father, and the Father in Him, so that He who has seen Him has seen the Father. He reveals God to us, instead of turning us away from Him. In grace He has already revealed Him, and we wait for the revelation of glory in Him. Already also on the earth, from the moment that He was born the angels celebrated the good pleasure of God in man, for the object of His eternal delight had become a man. And now He has accomplished the work which makes possible the introduction of others, of sinners, into the enjoyment with Himself of this favor of God. Once enemies, “we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son.”

It is thus that God has reconciled us to Himself. By faith thus knowing God, we “turn from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven.” The living and true God is the object of our joyful service. His Son, whom we know, who knows us, who will have us to be where He is, who has identified us with His own glory and His glory with us, He who is a glorified man for ever and firstborn among many brethren, is the object of our expectation. We expect Him from heaven, for our hopes are there, and there the seat of our joy.

We have the infinity of a God of love, the intimacy and the glory of Him who has taken part in all our infirmities, and, without sin, has born all our sins. What a portion is ours!

But there was another side of the truth. Creatures are responsible; and, however great His love and His patience, God cannot allow evil nor contempt of His authority: if He did, all would be confusion and misery. God Himself would lose His place. There is a judgment; there is wrath to come. We were responsible; we have failed. How then shall we enjoy God and the Son in the way that I have spoken of?

Here comes in the application of the third truth of which the apostle speaks: “which delivered us from the wrath to come.” The work of Christ has perfectly sheltered us from this wrath; He took our place in responsibility on the cross to put away sin for us by the sacrifice of Himself.

These then are the three great elements of christian life. We serve the living and the true God, having forsaken our idols outward or inward. We expect Jesus for glory; for this sight of God makes us feel what this world is, and we know Jesus. As to our sins and our conscience, we are perfectly cleansed; we fear nothing. The life and walk of the Thessalonians was a testimony to these truths.

Having established these great principles, the apostle, with an open and overflowing heart, appeals to his whole walk among them as a proof of his having walked in the same spirit as in their own case he was rejoicing in. It was not that he exhorted others, while availing himself of their affection, for his own advantage. It was not that he encouraged them to endure afflictions, without having courage himself to undergo the same. Ill-treated

and insulted at Philippi, he was bold in God to renew his attacks on the kingdom of darkness at Thessalonica, and that with great energy. He had not used flattering words to win them; he had set the truth before them, as being himself the servant of God. He had worked with his own hands that he might not be burdensome to them. All was before God in the light and by the energy of the Holy Ghost, and in a spirit of devotedness; even as he desired that they should walk as they knew he had walked among them, as holily, justly, and unblameably; as also he had exhorted them, with all affection and tenderness, to walk worthy of God, who had called them unto His own kingdom and glory.

We see again in this expression the close relationship of the Christian, in his individual character, with God. He has his portion in God's own kingdom and glory, and his conduct should become such a position. Here it is his own position in relationship with God, as before it was his relationship with God and the Lord Jesus.

The apostle then speaks of the means by which this world of new thoughts was acquired by the Christian. It was that God had spoken to reveal Himself and His counsels. God had committed the gospel to Paul (chap. 2:4), and he had acted as being in the presence of God, and responsible to Him.

The Thessalonians also, on their part, had received the word, not as the word of Paul, but as the word of God Himself addressed to them by the mouth of Paul. It is interesting, as for us also a serious thought, to observe that (with regard to the manifestation of the power of God down here), although the work is of God, the fruit of His servants' labors answers to the character and depth of that labor itself. Thus the bonds of grace are established, and communion; there is mutual understanding. The work manifests the workman. The laborer rejoices in that which his heart had desired for the souls that are the fruit of his labor; and these know how to appreciate the walk and the work of the laborer, acknowledging the power of grace in him who was the means of bringing them into this position; and the one and the others, knowing God, rejoice in the fellowship of His grace.

Paul was very largely with God in his own soul and in his work. The Thessalonians had in consequence received the word in the same power;

and they, with him, were thus in communion with God according to that power and that intimacy.

We see here, in passing, the Jews deprived of this relationship with God, the remnant of that people received, and suffering from the enmity of the mass. The elect from among the Gentiles awakened, on their part, the hostility of their fellow-countrymen by the testimony which they bore against the prince of this world in their christian walk, and by their confession of a heavenly Christa Christ whom the world had rejected.

The religion of the Jews had become pure jealousy of others. The pretension to the exclusive possession of religious privileges — very precious when they enjoyed it with God as a testimony of His favor — was nothing but a spring of hatred, when God in the fullness of His sovereign grace chose to bless others who had a right to nothing. By this exclusive pretension they denied the rights of God, who had formerly chosen them as a people; they denied His grace, according to which He acted towards sinners, and which would have been the source of better blessings for themselves. But meantime their refusal to come in had transferred the scene of our hopes and our joys from earth to heaven, where we know the Lord, and where He will remain until He comes to assert His claims over the earth. Before He asserts them, He will take us to Himself.

Meanwhile the word of God is the source of our confidence — the revelation of glory, of truth, and of love. It is mighty in them that believe. The Jews are set aside. By their opposition to grace towards the Gentiles, they had taken the position of enmity against God in grace, and wrath was come upon them to the uttermost. It was not yet executed; but they had put themselves in this position. It was not only that they had broken the law, they had already killed their prophets who were sent to them in grace; they had already slain the Christ, Jesus the Lord. Sovereign grace alone could bring in a remedy. This they resisted; because, according to that grace, God was good to the Gentiles, and granted to them, at the same time as to themselves, better privileges than those which they had forfeited. Wrath therefore was finally come upon them as a nation. Christians were now in the enjoyment of better privileges in place of the Jews.

It is not here the moment for explaining the future dealings of God with the remnant of that people. The apostle speaks of the people, in order to show that the only ones in relation with God were Christians — those who had received the word. It was the reception of the word by faith, and nothing else, which brought souls really into relationship with God. Hereditary privileges were found to be, in their nature, opposition to grace and sovereignty, and thus to the character and rights of God Himself; for God is sovereign, and God is love.

The word reveals grace; it is obeyed by believing it. And, brought into relationship with God, the Christian walks in communion and in His ways, and waits for the Son, in whom He has revealed Himself to men. This is the fruit of that which the Christian has received through believing — an efficacious principle of life, and a light from God for the way.

The apostle blessed God that it was thus with the Thessalonians; and, having made this point clear, he returns to the joy of his communion with them in the positive blessing which the revelation of God in their hearts by the word had brought them. He would gladly have seen them to enjoy this communion in intercourse with them face to face; but as long as it was by the word only that the knowledge of God was obtained — in a word by faith — as long as the Lord was absent, another result flowed from this fact; namely, that these joys were mingled with conflict — conflict however, which, although to the eye of man interrupting enjoyment, made it more sweet, more real, preserved its heavenly character, and made the Lord Himself, from whom they could not be separated, the center, the common point in which hearts were united, with the consciousness that they were in the wilderness, and that they were awaiting a scene and a time in which evil and the enemy's power would no longer be, but where Christ would be all. Joyful hope, holy happiness, powerful link of the heart to Christ! When He shall be all, our joy will be complete, and all saints will possess it. Paul wished to have seen them again, and had so even twice, but Satan hindered it. The time should come when he would fully enjoy both them and his labor among them, by seeing them in full possession of glory at the coming of Christ.

In the apostle himself, when at Thessalonica, christian life was fully developed in love and in holiness. He had been among them in tenderness,

as a mother cherishes her children; ready to impart not only the gospel to them, but even his own life, so dear were they to him. He had been at the same time holy and without blame in all his conduct. What energy of life and love springing up by the power of God, regardless of all the consequences save the blessing of the elect and the glory of God! This is true christian life. The heart, not filled with questionings through unbelief but strong in faith, counts on God in order to serve God. Thus love is free, beside oneself for God, prudent and full of consideration only for the good of others. And what bonds this creates! Persecution only hastens the work by compelling to go elsewhere, when perhaps the laborer would be tempted to enjoy the fruits of his labor in the society. of those who had been blessed through him (compare chap. 2:2). Though absent, the apostle's heart was still bound to them; he remembered his beloved ones; he prayed for them; he blessed God for the grace bestowed on them; assuring himself with joy, when he thought of it, their portion in glory as the elect of God (chap. 1:3, 4; 2:13).

The bond remained firm; and, the way to present enjoyment personal communion being obstructed by the devices of Satan (by permission of God), his heart rose higher, and sought the full satisfaction of the want produced in it by love, in the moment when a Christ present in His power should have removed all obstacles and accomplished the purposes of God with respect to the saints; when His love should have born all its precious fruits in them; and when Paul and his dear children in the faith should enjoy together all that grace and the power of the Spirit should have wrought in them. Unable for the moment to satisfy the desires of his heart by seeing them, it was to that hour that Paul looked. And observe that, if he does so, it is because his heart was already filled with it for himself. The power of the Spirit, acting in accordance with the truth, always leads the heart to that hour. It impels the heart to labor in love in the midst of this world, causes thus the opposition of the darkness of this world to the light (whether on the part of man or of the prince of darkness) to be realised, and makes us always feel the need of that day of light, when evil shall no longer be present to hinder the happiness of the new man in his enjoyment of that which is good, in his communion with those dear to God, and; above all, in the enjoyment of the presence of his glorified Savior, who has

loved him, and who (for the exercise of his faith) is at present hidden from him.

It is He who is the source and object of all these affections, who sustains and nourishes them, who attracts them ever to Himself by His perfections and by His love, and, in the sorrows of the christian life, carries the heart onward thus to the day of our being with Himself, to the day of His coming, when the heart will be free to occupy itself with all that binds us to Him without interruption. This thought of His presence has the mastery, when the heart is fresh in the divine joy of redemption. We find this here. We are converted to wait for Him (chap. 1); we shall enjoy the communion of saints, and the fruit of our labors when He returns (chap. 2); that day gives its force and its measure to our thoughts respecting holiness (chap. 3); it destroys the anguish of heart which would otherwise accompany the death of the saints (chap. 4); it is for that day we are kept (chap. 5). The coming of the Lord, the presence of Jesus, fills therefore the believer's heart, when life is springing up in its freshness — fills it with a joyous hope, the fulfillment of which shines bright before our eyes, there where all our desires will be accomplished.

To return to the end of chapter 2, the link which Satan sought to break by interrupting its enjoyment was but the rather strengthened by being connected with the coming of the Lord. The current of the Spirit, against which he had been allowed to set up this dike, though turned from its natural bed, could not be stopped, for its waters ever flow; they gushed out in waves that enriched all around them, taking their course towards that sea which contained the fullness of those waters and fed the source from which they sprang.

It should be observed here, that the special fruits of our labors are not lost; they are found again at the coming of Christ. Our chief personal joy is to see the Lord Himself and to be like Him. This is the portion of all saints; but there are particular fruits in connection with the work of the Spirit in us and by us. At Thessalonica the spiritual energy of the apostle had brought a number of souls to God and to wait for Jesus, and into a close union in the truth with Himself. This energy would be crowned at the coming of Christ by the presence of these believers in the glory as the fruit of his labors. God would thus crown the apostle's work by bearing a

striking testimony to its faithfulness in the presence of all these saints in glory; and the love which had wrought in Paul's heart would be satisfied by seeing its object in glory and in the presence of Jesus. They would be his glory and joy. This thought drew yet closer the bonds that united them, and comforted the apostle in the midst of his toils and sufferings.

Now this forced removal of the apostle as the chief laborer, without weakening the bond between him and the disciples, formed other links which would consolidate and strengthen the assembly, knitting it together by that which every joint supplied. This is connected (all things are but the instruments of the power and wisdom of God) with the circumstances of which the Acts of the Apostles give us the principal details.

After the persecutions excited by the Jews the apostle made a short stay at Thessalonica, and was then obliged to leave that city and go to Berea. Even there the Jews of Thessalonica followed him, and influenced those of Berea, so that the Berean brethren had to provide for his safety. The person to whom they committed him brought him to Athens; Silas and Timotheus remained at Berea for the moment, but soon at his command rejoined him at Athens. Meantime a violent persecution raged against the Christians at Thessalonica, a city of importance, in which, as it appears, the Jews had already exercised a considerable measure of influence over the heathen population — an influence that was undermined by the progress of Christianity, which the Jews in their blindness rejected.

The apostle, learning this state of things from Silas and Timotheus, was concerned at the danger his new converts ran in being shaken in faith by the difficulties that beset their path while they were still young in the faith. His affection would not allow him to rest without putting himself in communication with them, and already from Athens he had sent Timotheus to inquire into their condition, and to establish their hearts by reminding them that while yet with them he had told them these things would happen. During his absence Paul left Athens and went to Corinth, where Timotheus again comforted him by the good tidings he brought from Thessalonica, and the apostle resumed his labors at Corinth with renewed energy and courage (see Acts 18:5).

On the arrival of Timotheus Paul wrote this letter. Timotheus had informed him. of the good state of the Thessalonian Christians — that

they held fast the faith, that they greatly desired to see the apostle, and that they walked together in love. In the midst of his sorrows, and of the opposition of men — in a word, of the afflictions of the gospel — the apostle's spirit is refreshed by these tidings. He is himself strengthened, for if the faith of the laborer is the means of blessing to souls, and in general the measure of the outward character of the work, the faith of the Christians who are the fruit of his labors, and who correspond to it, is in return a source of strength and encouragement to the laborer; even as their prayers are a great means of blessing to him.

Love finds in their spiritual welfare both its food and its joy; faith, that which sustains and strengthens it. The word of God is felt in it. "I live," says the apostle, "if ye stand fast in the Lord. What thanks," he adds, "can we render to God for you, for all the joy wherewith we rejoice for your sakes before God?" Beautiful and affecting picture of the effect of the operation of the Spirit of God, delivering souls from the corruption of the world, and producing the purest affections, the greatest self-renunciation for the sake of others, the greatest joy in their happiness — divine joy, realised before God Himself, and the value of which was appreciated in His presence by the spiritual heart that abode in it, the heart which, on the part of that God of love, had been the means of its existence.

What a bond is the bond of the Spirit! How selfishness is forgotten, and disappears in the joy of such affections! The apostle, animated by this affection, which increased instead of growing weary by its exercise, and by the satisfaction it received in the happiness of others, desires so much the more, from the Thessalonians being thus sustained, to see them again; not now for the purpose of strengthening them, but to build upon that which was already so established, and to complete their spiritual instruction by imparting that which was yet lacking to their faith. But he is, and he ought to be, a laborer and not a master (God makes us feel this), and he depends entirely on God for his work, and for the edification of others. In fact years passed away before he saw the Thessalonians again. He remained a long time at Corinth, where the Lord had much people; he revisited Jerusalem, then all Asia Minor where he had labored earlier; thence he went to Ephesus, where he abode nearly three years; and after that he saw the Thessalonians again, when he left that city to go to Corinth, taking his

journey by the way of Macedonia, in order not to visit Corinth before the restoration of the Christians there to order.

“God himself” — it is thus that the apostle’s desire and his submission to the will of God expresses itself — ”God himself direct our way unto you.” His desire is not vague. He refers to God as to his Father, the source of all these holy affections, Him who holds the place of Father to us, and orders all things with a view to the good of His children, according to that perfect wisdom which embraces all things and all His children at once. “Our God and Father himself,” the apostle says. But there is another consideration — not, assuredly, in opposition to this, for God is one, but which has another and less individual character: and he adds — ”And our Lord Jesus Christ.” Christ is Son over God’s house, and besides joy and blessing and individual affections, there was the progress, the welfare, and the development of the whole assembly to be considered. These two parts of Christianity act assuredly upon each other.

Where the operation of the Spirit is full and unhindered, the well-being of the assembly and the individual affections are in harmony. If anything is lacking in the one, God uses the failure itself to act powerfully on the other. If the assembly as a whole is weak, individual faith is exercised in a special manner, and more immediately upon God Himself. There are no Elijahs and Elishas in the reign of Solomon. On the other hand the watchful care of the assembly by those divinely engaged in it is the true energy of its spiritual organisation, strengthens the life, and re-awakens the spiritual affections of its slumbering members. But the two things are different. Therefore the apostle adds to “our God and Father,” “and our Lord Jesus Christ,” who, as we have said, according to Hebrews 3, is Son over His house. It is a blessing that our path depends on the love of a Father, who is God Himself, acting according to the tender affections expressed by that name; and, as to the well-being of the assembly, that it depends on the government of a Lord like Jesus, who loves it with a perfect love: and who, although He took such a place, is the God who created all things, the Man who has all power in heaven and on earth, to whom Christians are the objects of incessant and faithful care — care which He expends in order to bring the assembly finally unto Himself in glory according to the counsels of God.

* Such then was the apostle's first wish, and such were they with regard to whom he formed it. Meanwhile he must leave his beloved Thessalonians to the immediate care of the Lord on whom he depended (compare Acts 20:32). To that his heart turns. May God direct my way to come to you. "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all.?" And his heart could present its affection for them, as the pattern of that which they ought to feel for others. This power of love maintains the heart in the presence of God, and makes it find its joy in the light of His presence, and earnestly desire that all saints may be in His presence, their hearts fitted for it and there. For God is love, and the exercise of love in the Christian's heart (fruit of the presence and the operation of the Spirit) is in fact the effect of the presence of God; and at the same time it makes us feel His presence, so that it keeps us before Him and maintains sensible communion in the heart. Love may suffer and thereby prove its strength, but we are speaking of the spontaneous exercise of love towards the objects which God presents to it.

[* It is well here to recall that, though Christ is Son over God's house, as Lord He is not Lord over the assembly but over individuals. Besides this, He is in a general sense Lord of all. But His action towards individuals ministers to the well-being of the assembly.]

Now, being thus the development of the divine nature in us, and the sustainment of our hearts in communion with God Himself, love is the bond of perfectness, the true means of holiness, when it is real. The heart is kept, far away from the flesh and its thoughts, in the pure light of the presence of God, which the soul thus enjoys. For this reason the apostle prays, while waiting to give them more light, that the Lord would increase love in them, in order to establish their hearts unblamable in holiness before God even our Father in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. Here we find again the two great principles of which I spoke at the end of chapter 1: God in the perfection of His nature; and the Lord Jesus in the intimacy of His connection with us — God however as Father, and Jesus as Lord. We are before God, and Jesus comes with His saints. He has brought them to perfection; they are with Him, and thus before God known in the relationship of Father.

Observe also that everything refers to this hope: it was an actual and present expectation. If they were converted, it was to serve God and to

wait for His Son from heaven. Everything related to that wondrous moment when He should come. That which holiness was would be demonstrated when they should be before God, and the saints would be with their Head; moreover manifested with Him in glory, even as then they should also fully enjoy the fruit of their labor, and the reward of love in the joy of all those whom they had loved.*

[* It is very striking how holiness here, and manifestation in glory, are brought together as one thing in scripture, only the veil drawn aside when the glory is there. Even Christ was declared Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection. We beholding the glory with unveiled face are changed into the same image from glory to glory. So here; we are to walk in love, to be unblamable in holiness. We should have said here; but no, the veil is drawn at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. In Ephesians 5 He washes us with the word, to present us a glorious body without spot to Himself.]

The scene which would be the consummation of the work is presented here in all its moral bearing. We are before God, in His presence, where holiness is demonstrated in its true character; we are there for perfect communion with God in the light, where the connection of holiness with His nature and with the manifestation of Himself is apparent; even as this manifestation is in connection with the development of a nature in us, which by grace sets us in relationship with Him.

“Unblameable,” he says, “in holiness,” and in holiness “before God.” He is light. What immense joy, what power, through grace, in this thought, for the time present, to keep ourselves manifested before Him! But only love, known in Him, can do this.

But also we add “Our Father.” It is a known and real relationship, which has its own peculiar character, a relationship of love. It is not a thing to be acquired, and holiness is not the means of acquiring it. Holiness is the character of our relationship with God, inasmuch as we have received His nature as His children, and it is the revelation of the perfection of that nature in Him in love. Love itself has given us that nature, and has placed us in that relationship; practical holiness is its exercise in communion with God, having fellowship with Him in His presence according to the love which we thus know, that is, God Himself as He has revealed Himself towards us.

But the heart is not alone: there is companionship in this joy and in this perfection; and above all it is with Jesus Himself. He will come, He will be present, and not only He who is the Head, but all the saints with Him will be there also. It will be the accomplishment of the ways of God respecting those whom He had given to Jesus. We shall see Him in His glory, the glory which He has taken in connection with His coming for us. We shall see all the saints in whom He will be admired, and see them in the perfection which our hearts desire for them now.

Observe also that love makes us rise above the difficulties, the persecutions, the fears, which the enemy seeks to produce. Occupied with God, happy in Him, this weight of affliction is not felt. The strength of God is in the heart; the walk is sensibly connected with the eternal happiness possessed with Him, and the affliction is felt to be but light and for a moment. Nor this only; we suffer for Christ's sake: it is joy with Him, it is intimacy of communion, if we know how to appreciate it, and all is invested with the glory and salvation that are found at the end — "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

In reading this passage one cannot but observe the immediate and living way in which the Lord's coming is linked with daily practical life, so that the perfect light of that day is thrown upon the hourly path of the present time. By the exercise of love they were to be established in holiness before God at the coming of Christ. From one day to another, that day was looked for as the consummation and the only term they contemplated to the ordinary life of each day here below. How this brought the soul into the presence of God! Moreover, as I have already in part observed, they lived in a known relationship with God which gave room for this confidence. He was their Father; He is ours. The relationship of the saints to Jesus was equally known. The saints were "his saints." They were all to come with Him. They were associated with His glory. There is nothing equivocal in the expression. Jesus, the Lord, coming with all His saints, allows us to think of no other event than His return in glory. Then also will He be glorified in His saints, who will already have rejoined Him to be for ever with Him. It will be the day of their manifestation as of His.

The apostle then turns to the dangers that beset the Thessalonians in consequence of their former habits (and which were still those of the

persons that surrounded them), habits in direct contradiction to the holy and heavenly joy of which he spoke. He had already shown them how they were to walk and to please God. In this way he had himself walked among them (chap. 2:10). He would exhort them to a similar conduct with all the weight that his own walk gave him, even as he would desire their growth in love according to the affection he had for them (compare Acts 26:29). It is this which gives authority to the exhortation, and to all the words of a servant of the Lord.

The apostle takes up especially the subject of purity, for the pagan morals were so corrupt that impurity was not even accounted to be sin. It appears strange to us that such an exhortation should have been needful to such lively Christians as the Thessalonians; but we do not make allowance enough for the power of those habits in which persons have been brought up, and which become as it were a part of our nature and of the current of our thoughts, and for the action of two distinct natures under the influence of these, though the allowance or cultivation of one soon deadens the other. But the motives given here show upon what entirely new ground, as regards the commonest morality, Christianity places us. The body was but as a vessel to be used at will for whatever service they chose. They were to possess this vessel, instead of allowing themselves to be carried away by the desires of the flesh; because they knew God. They were not to deceive their brethren in these things,* for the Lord would take vengeance. God has called us to holiness: it is with Him that we have to do; and if any one despised his brother, taking advantage of his feebleness of mind to encroach upon his rights in this respect, it would be to despise not man but God, who would Himself remember it, and who has given us His Spirit; and to act thus would be to despise that Spirit, both in one's self and in one's brother in whom He also dwells. He who was wronged in this way was not only the husband of a wife, he was the dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost and ought to be respected as such. On what high ground Christianity places a man, and that in connection with our best affections!

[* "in the matter," v. 6, in the Greek, is a euphemism for "these things."

As touching brotherly love — that new mainspring of their life — it was not necessary to exhort them: God Himself had taught them, and they were an example of love to all. Only let them abound in it even more and

more; walking quietly, working with their own hands, so as to be in no man's debt, that in this respect also the Lord might be glorified.

Such were the apostle's exhortations. That which follows is an absolutely new revelation for their encouragement and consolation.

We have seen that the Thessalonians were always expecting the Lord. It was their near and immediate hope in connection with their daily life. They were constantly expecting Him to take them to Himself. They had been converted to wait for the Son of God from heaven. Now (from want of instruction) it appeared to them that the saints who had recently died would not be with them to be caught up. The apostle clears up this point, and distinguishes between the coming of Christ to take up His own, and His day, which was a day of judgment to the world. They were not to be troubled with regard to those who had died in Christ* as those who had no hope were troubled. And the reason which he gives for this is a proof of the strict connection of their entire spiritual life with the expectation of Christ's personal return to bring them into heavenly glory. The apostle, in comforting them with regard to their brethren who had lately died, does not say a word of the survivors rejoining them in heaven. They are maintained in the thought that they were still to look for the Lord during their lifetime to transform them into His glorious image (compare 2 Corinthians 5 and 1 Corinthians 15). An especial revelation was required to make them understand that those who had previously died would equally have their part in that event. Their part, so to speak, would resemble that of Christ. He has died, and He has risen again. And so will it be with them. And when He should return in glory, God would bring them — even as He would bring the others, that is, the living — with Him.

[* It has been thought that the apostle speaks here of those who had died for His name's sake as martyrs. It may have been so in consequence of the persecutions, but "through Jesus" would be a singular way of expressing it; *dia* (through) with a genitive is used for a state of things, a condition that we are in, that characterises us. Being in Christ, their removal was but falling asleep, not dying. They had this position by means of Jesus, not for His name's sake. (Compare, however, 2 Corinthians 4:14).]

Upon this the apostle gives some more detailed explanation of the Lord's coming in the form of express revelation, showing how they would be with Him so as to come with Him when He appears. The living will not take precedence of those who sleep in Jesus. The Lord Himself will come as the

Head of His heavenly army, dispersed for a time, to gather them to Himself. He gives the word. The voice of the archangel passes it on, and the trumpet of God is sounded. The dead in Christ will rise first, that is to say, before the living go up; Then we who shall be alive and remain shall go with them, all together, in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. So shall we be for ever with the Lord.

It was thus that the Lord Himself ascended; for in all things we are to be like Him an important circumstance here. Whether transformed or raised from the dead, we shall all go up in the clouds. It was in the clouds that He ascended, and thus we shall be ever with Him.

In this part of the passage, where he explains the details of our ascension to the Lord in the air, nothing is said of His coming down to the earth; it is our going up (as He went up) to be with Him.* Neither, as far as concerns us, does the apostle go farther than our gathering together to be for ever with Him. Nothing is said either of judgment or of manifestation; but only the fact of our heavenly association with Him in that we leave the earth precisely as He left it. This is very precious. There is this difference: He went up in His own full right, He ascended; as to us, His voice calls the dead, and they come forth from the grave, and, the living being changed, all are caught up together. It is a solemn act of God's power, which seals the Christians' life and the work of God, and brings the former into the glory of Christ as His heavenly companions. Glorious privilege! Precious grace! To lose sight of it destroys the proper character of our joy and of our hope.

[* In order that we may all return — be brought back with Him — together.]

Other consequences follow, which are the result of His manifestation; but that is our portion, our hope. We leave the earth as He did, we shall for ever be with Him.

It is with these words that we are to comfort ourselves if believers die — fall asleep in Jesus. They shall return with Him when He shall be manifested; but, as regards their own portion, they will go away as He went, whether raised from the dead or transformed, to be for ever with the Lord.

All the rest refers to His government of the earth: an important subject, a part of His glory; and we also take part in it. But it is not our own peculiar portion. This is, to be with Him, to be like Him, and even (when the time shall come) to quit in the same manner as Himself the world which rejected Him, and which has rejected us, and which is to be judged.

I repeat it: to lose sight of this is to lose our essential portion. All lies in the words, "so shall we ever be with the Lord." The apostle has here explained how this will take place.* Remark here, that verses 15-18 are a parenthesis, and that chapter 5:1 follows on chapter 4:14; chapter 5 showing what He will do when He brings the saints with Him according to chapter 4:14.

[* Compare 2 Corinthians 5:1, etc. We have already remarked as a fact that this passage is a new distinct revelation. But the bearing of this fact appears here and proves that it has much importance. The Christian's life is so connected with the day (that is to say, with the power of the life of light of which Christ lives), and Christ who is already in glory is so truly the believer's life, that he has no other thought than to pass into it by this power of Christ's, which will transform him (see 2 Corinthians 5:4). It required a new and accessory revelation to explain that which was wanting to the intelligence of the Thessalonians, how the dead saints should not lose their part in it. The same power would be applied to their dead bodies as to the mortal bodies of the living saints, and all would be caught up together. But the victory over death was already gained, and Christ, according to the power of resurrection, being already the believer's life, it was but natural, according to that power, that he should pass without dying into the fullness of life with Christ. This was so much the natural thought of faith that it required an express, and as I have said, an accessory revelation to explain how the dead should have their part in it. To us now it presents no difficulty. It is the other side of this truth which we lack, which belongs to a much more lively faith, and which realizes much more the power of the life of Christ and His victory over death. No doubt the Thessalonians should have considered that Christ had died and risen again, and not have allowed the abundant power of their joy in realising their own portion in Christ to hide from them the certainty of the portion of those who slept in Him. But we see (and God allowed it that we might see) how the life which they possessed was connected with the position of the Head triumphant over death. The apostle does not weaken this faith and hope, but he adds (that they may be comforted by the thought) that the triumph of Christ would have the same power over the sleeping as over the living saints; and that God would bring back the former as well as the latter with Jesus in glory, having caught them up together as their common portion to be for ever with Him. To us also God gives this truth, this revelation of His power. He has permitted thousands to fall asleep, because (blessed be His name!) He had other thousands to call in; but the life of Christ has not lost its power, nor the truth its certainty. We as living ones wait for Him because He is our life.

We shall see Him in resurrection, if haply we die before He comes to seek us; and the time draws near. Observe, also, that this revelation gives another direction to the hope of the Thessalonians, because it distinguishes with much precision between our departure hence to join the Lord in the air, and our return to the earth with Him. Nor this only; but it shows the first to be the principal thing for Christians, while at the same time confirming and elucidating the other point. I question whether the Thessalonians would not better have understood this return with Christ than our departure hence all together to rejoin Him. Even at their conversion they had been brought to wait for Jesus from heaven. From the first the great and essential principle was established in their hearts — the Person of Christ was the object of their hearts' expectation, and they were separated thereby from the world. Perhaps they had some vague idea that they were to appear with Him in glory, but how it was to be accomplished they knew not. They were to be ready at any moment for His coming, and He and they were to be glorified together before the universe. This they knew. It is a summary of the truth. Now the apostle develops more than one point here in connection with this general truth. 1st, they would be with Christ at His coming. This, I think, is but a happy application of a truth which they already possessed, giving a little more precision to one of its precious details. At the end of chapter 3 we have the truth plainly stated (although it was still indistinct in their hearts, since they thought the dead in Christ would be deprived of it) that all the saints should come with Jesus — an essential point as to the character of our relationship to Him. So that Jesus was expected — the saints should be together with Jesus at the time of His coming — all the saints should come with Him. This fixed and gave precision to their ideas on a point already more or less known. 2nd, That which follows is a new revelation on the occasion of their mistake with regard to those who slept. They thought indeed that the Christians who were ready should be glorified with Christ when He came back to this world; but the dead — were they ready? They were not present to share the glorious manifestation of Christ on the earth. For, I doubt not, the vague idea that possessed the mind of the Thessalonians was this: Jesus would return to this world, and they who were waiting for Him would share His glorious manifestation on the earth. Now the apostle declares that the dead saints were in the same position as Jesus who had died. God had not left Him in the grave; nor would He those who had, like Him, been there. God would also bring them with Him when He should return in glory to this earth. But this was not all. The coming of Christ in glory to the earth was not the principal thing. The dead in Christ should be raised, and then, with the living, should go to meet the Lord in the air, before His manifestation, and return with Him to the earth in glory; and thus should they be ever with the Lord. This was the principal thing, the Christian's portion; namely, to dwell eternally with Christ and in heaven. The portion of the faithful was on high — was Christ Himself, although they would appear with Him in the glory. For this world it would then be the judgment.]

In this important passage then we find the Christian living in an expectation of the Lord, which is connected with his daily life and which completes it. Death then is only an accessory which may take place, and

which does not deprive the Christian of his portion when his Master shall return. The proper expectation of the Christian is entirely separated from all which follows the manifestation of Christ, and which is in connection with the government of this world.

The Lord comes in Person to receive us to Himself; He does not send. With full authority over death, which He has conquered, and with the trump of God, He calls together His own from the grave; and these, with the living (transformed), go to meet Him in the air. Our departure from the world exactly resembles His own: we leave the world, to which we do not belong, to go to heaven. Once there, we have attained our portion. We are like Christ, we are for ever with Him, but He will bring His own with Him, when He shall appear. This then was the true comfort in the case of a Christian's death, and by no means put aside the daily expectation of the Lord from heaven. On the contrary this way of viewing the subject confirmed it. The dead saint did not lose his rights by dying — by sleeping in Jesus; he should be the first object of his Lord's attention when He came to assemble His own. Nevertheless the place from which they go forth to meet Him is the earth. The dead should be raised — this was the first thing — that they might be ready to go with the others; and then from this earth all would depart together to be with Christ in heaven. This point of view is all-important, in order to apprehend the true character of that moment when all our hopes will be consummated.

The Lord's coming again into this world assumes therefore a very different character from that of a vague object of hope to a believer as a period of glory. In chapter 5 the apostle speaks of it, but in order to distinguish between the position of Christians and that of the careless and unbelieving inhabitants of the earth. The Christian, alive and taught of the Lord, ever expects the Master. There are times and seasons; it is not needful to speak to him concerning them. But (and he knows it) the day of the Lord will come, and like a thief in the night, but not for him: he is of the day; he has part in the glory which will appear in order to execute judgment on the unbelieving world. Believers are the children of light; and this light, which is the judgment of unbelievers, is the expression of the glory of God — a glory which cannot endure evil, and which, when it shall appear, will banish it from the earth. The Christian is of the day that will judge and destroy the wicked and wickedness itself from off the face of the earth.

Christ is the Sun of righteousness, and the faithful will shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

The world will say, "Peace and safety," and in all security will believe in the continuance of its prosperity and the success of its designs, and the day will come suddenly upon them (compare 2 Peter 3:3). The Lord Himself has often declared it (Matthew 24:36-44; Mark 13:33-36; Luke 12:40, etc.; 17:26, etc.; 21:35, etc.).

It is a very solemn thing to see that the professing church (Revelation 3:3) which says that it lives and is in the truth, which has not Thyatira's character of corruption, is yet to be treated as the world — at least, unless it repents.

We may perhaps wonder to find the Lord saying of a time like this, that men's hearts will be failing them for fear, and for looking after those things that are coming on the earth (Luke 21:26). But we see the two principles — both security and fear — already existing. Progress, success, the long continuance of a new development of human nature — this is the language of those who mock at the Lord's coming; and yet beneath it all, what fears for the future are at the same time possessing and weighing down the heart! I use the word "principles," because I do not believe that the moment of which the Lord speaks is yet come. But the shadow of coming events falls upon the heart. Blessed are they that belong to another world!

The apostle applies this difference of position — namely, that we belong to the day, and that it cannot therefore come upon us as a thief — to the character and walk of the Christian. Being a child of the light he is to walk as such. He lives in the day, though all is night and darkness around him. One does not sleep in the day. They that sleep sleep in the night: they that are drunken are drunken in the night; these are the works of darkness. A Christian, the child of the day, must watch and be sober, clothing himself with all that constitutes the perfection of that mode of being which belongs to his position — namely, with faith and love and hope — principles which impart courage and give him confidence for pressing onwards. He has the breastplate of faith and love: he goes straight forward therefore against the enemy. He has the hope of this glorious salvation, which will bring him entire deliverance, as his helmet; so that he can lift up his head without fear in the midst of danger. We see that the apostle here brings to

mind the three great principles of 1 Corinthians 13 to characterise the courage and steadfastness of the Christian, as at the beginning he showed that they were the mainspring of daily walk.

Faith and love naturally connect us with God, revealed as He is in Jesus as the principle of communion; so that we walk with confidence in Him: His presence gives us strength. By faith He is the glorious object before our eyes. By love He dwells in us, and we realise what He is. Hope fixes our eyes especially on Christ, who is coming to bring us into the enjoyment of glory with Himself.

Consequently the apostle speaks thus: “For God hath not appointed us to wrath” (love is understood by faith, that which God wills — His mind respecting us), “but to obtain salvation.” It is this which we hope for; and he speaks of salvation as the final deliverance “by our Lord Jesus Christ”: and he naturally adds, “who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep” (have died before His coming or be then alive), “we should live together with Him.” Death does not deprive us of this deliverance and glory; for Jesus died. Death became the means of obtaining them for us; and if we die, we shall equally live with Him. He died for us, in our stead, in order that, happen what may, we should live with Him. Everything that hindered it is put out of our way and has lost its power; and, more than lost its power, has become a guarantee of our unhindered enjoyment of the full life of Christ in glory; so that we may comfort ourselves — and more than that, we may build ourselves up — with these glorious truths, through which God meets all our wants and all our necessities. This (v. 10) is the end of the special revelation with regard to those who sleep before the coming of the Lord Jesus, beginning with chapter 4:13.

I would here call the reader’s attention to the way in which the apostle speaks of the Lord’s coming in the different chapters of this epistle. It will be noticed that the Spirit does not present the church here as a body. Life is the subject — that of each Christian therefore individually: a very important point assuredly.

In **CHAPTER 1** the expectation of the Lord is presented in a general way as characterising the Christian. They are converted to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven. Here it is the object itself that is presented, the Person of the Lord. God’s own Son shall come, and shall

satisfy all the heart's desire. This is neither His kingdom, nor the judgment, nor even rest; it is the Son of God; and this Son of God is Jesus, risen from among the dead, and who has delivered us from the wrath to come; for wrath is coming Each believer therefore expects for himself the Son of God — expects Him from heaven.

In **CHAPTER 2** it is association with the saints, joy in the saints at the coming of Christ.

In **CHAPTER 3** responsibility is more the subject — responsibility in liberty and in joy; but still a position before God in connection with the Christian's walk and life here below. The Lord's appearing is the measure and test time of holiness. The testimony rendered by God to this life, by giving it its natural place, takes place when Christ is manifested with all His saints. It is not here His coming for us, but His coming with us. This distinction between the two events always; exists. For Christians even and for the church, that which refers to responsibility is always found in connection with the appearing of the Lord; our joy, with His coming to take us to Himself.

Thus far then, we have the general expectation of the Lord in Person, His Son from heaven; love satisfied at His coming as regards others; holiness in its full value and full development. In chapter 4 it is not the connection of life with its full development in our being actually with Christ, but victory over death (which is no barrier to this); and, at the same time, the strengthening and establishment of hope in our common departure hence, similarly to that of Jesus, to be for ever with Him.

The exhortations that conclude the epistle are brief; the mighty action of the life of God in these dear disciples made them comparatively little needed. Exhortation is always good. There was nothing among them to blame. Happy condition! They were perhaps not sufficiently instructed for a large development of doctrine (the apostle hoped to see them for that purpose); but there was enough of life, a personal relationship with God sufficiently true and real, to build them up on that ground. To him that hath shall more be given. The apostle could rejoice with them and confirm their hope and add to it some details as a revelation from God. The assembly in all ages is profited by it.

In the epistle to the Philippians we see life in the Spirit rising above all circumstances, as the fruit of long experience of the goodness and faithfulness of God; and thus showing its remarkable power when the help of the saints had failed, and the apostle was in distress, his life in danger, after four years' imprisonment, by a merciless tyrant. It is then that he decides his case by the interests of the assembly. It is then that he can proclaim, that we ought always to rejoice in the Lord, and that Christ is all things to him, to live is Christ, death a gain to him. It is then that he can do all things through Him, who strengthens him. This he has learnt. In Thessalonians we have the freshness of the fountain near to its source; the energy of the first spring of life in the believer's soul, presenting all the beauty and purity and vigor of its first verdure under the influence of the sun that had risen upon them and made the sap of life rise, the first manifestations of which had not been deteriorated by contact with the world or by an enfeebled view of invisible things.

The apostle desired that the disciples should acknowledge those who labored among them and guided them in grace and admonished them, and esteem them greatly for their work's sake. The operation of God always attracts a soul that is moved by the Holy Ghost, and commands its attention and its respect: on this foundation the apostle builds his exhortation. It is not office which is in question here (if such existed), but the work which attracted and attached the heart. They ought to be known: spirituality acknowledged this operation of God. Love, devotedness, the answer to the need of souls, patience in dealing with them on the part of God — all this commended itself to the believer's heart: and it blessed God for the care He bestowed upon His children. God acted in the laborer and in the hearts of the faithful. Blessed be God, it is an ever-existing principle, and one that never grows weaker!

The same Spirit produced peace among themselves. This grace was of great value. If love appreciated the work of God in the laborer, it would esteem the brother as in the presence of God: self-will would not act.

Now this renunciation of self-will, and this practical sense of the operation and presence of God, gives power to warn the unruly, to comfort the fearful, to help the weak, and to be patient towards all. The apostle exhorts them to it. Communion with God is the power and His word the

guide in so doing. In no case were they to render evil for evil, but to follow that which was good among themselves and towards all. All this conduct depends on communion with God, on His presence with us, which makes us superior to evil. He is this in love; and we can be so by walking with Him.

Such were the apostle's exhortations to guide their walk with others. As regards their personal state, joy, prayer, thanksgiving in all things, these should be their characteristics. With respect to the public actings of the Spirit in their midst, the apostle's exhortations to these simple and happy Christians were equally brief. They were not to hinder the action of the Spirit in their midst (for this is the meaning of quenching the Spirit); nor to despise that which He might say to them, even by the mouth of the most simple, if He were pleased to use it. Being spiritual, they could judge all things. They were therefore not to receive everything that presented itself, even in the name of the Spirit, but to prove all things. They were to hold fast that which was good; those who by faith have received the truth of the word do not waver. One is not ever learning the truth of that which one has learnt from God. As to evil, they were to abstain from it in all its forms. Such were the apostle's brief exhortations to these Christians who indeed rejoiced his heart. And in truth it is a fine picture of christian walk, which we find here so livingly portrayed in the apostle's communications.

He concludes his epistle by commending them to the God of peace, that they might be preserved blameless until the coming of the Lord Jesus.

After an epistle like this his heart turned readily to the God of peace; for we enjoy peace in the presence of God — not only peace of conscience but peace of heart.

In the previous part we found the activity of love in the heart; that is to say, God present and acting in us, who are viewed as partaking, at the same time, of the divine nature, which is the spring of that holiness which will be manifested in all its perfection before God at the coming of Jesus with all His saints. Here it is the God of peace, to whom the apostle looks for the accomplishment of this work. There it was the activity of a divine principle in us a principle connected with the presence of God and our communion with Him. Here it is the perfect rest of heart in which holiness develops itself. The absence of peace in the heart arises from the activity

of the passions and the will, increased by the sense of powerlessness to satisfy or even to gratify them.

But in God all is peace. He can be active in love; He can glorify Himself by creating what He will; He can act in judgment to cast out the evil that is before His eyes. But He rests ever in Himself, and both in good and in evil He knows the end from the beginning and is undisturbed. When He fills the heart, He imparts this rest to us: we cannot rest in ourselves; we cannot find rest of heart in the actings of our passions, either without an object or upon an object, nor in the rending and destructive energy of our own will. We find our rest in God — not the rest that implies weariness, but rest of heart in the possession of all that we desire, and of that which even forms our desires and fully satisfies them, in the possession of an object in which conscience has nothing to reproach us and has but to be silent, in the certainty that it is the Supreme Good which the heart is enjoying, the supreme and only authority to whose will it responds — and that will is love towards us. God bestows rest, peace. He is never called the God of joy. He gives us joy truly, and we ought to rejoice; but joy implies something surprising, unexpected, exceptional, at least in contrast with, and in consequence of, evil. The peace that we possess, that which satisfies us, has no element of this kind, nothing which is in contrast, nothing which disturbs. It is more deep, more perfect, than joy. It is more the satisfaction of a nature in that which perfectly answers to it, and in which it develops itself, without any contrast being necessary to enhance the satisfaction of a heart that has not all which it desires, or of which it is capable.

God, as we have said, rests thus in Himself — is this rest for Himself. He gives us, and is for us, this entire peace. The conscience being perfect through the work of Christ who has made peace and reconciled us to God, the new nature — and consequently the heart — finds its perfect satisfaction in God, and the will is silent; moreover, it has nothing further to desire.

It is not only that God meets the desires that we have: He is the source of new desires to the new man by the revelation of Himself in love.* He is both the source of the nature and its infinite object; and that, in love. It is His part to be so. It is more than creation; it is reconciliation, which is

more than creation, because there is in it more development of love, that is to say, of God: and it is thus that we know God. It is that which He is essentially in Christ.

[* Hence there is the opposite to weariness in the heavenly enjoyment of God; because He who is the infinite object of enjoyment is the infinite source and strength of capacity to enjoy, though we enjoy as recipient creatures.]

In the angels He glorifies Himself in creation: they excel us in strength. In Christians He glorifies Himself in reconciliation, to make them the first-fruits of His new creation, when He shall have reconciled all things in heaven and on earth by Christ. Therefore it is written “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children sons] of God.” They have His nature and His character.

It is in these relationships with God — or rather it is God in these relationships with us in peace, in His communion, who develops sanctification, our inward conformity of affection and intelligence (and consequently of outward conduct) with Him and His will. “The God of peace himself sanctify you wholly.” May there be nothing in us that does not yield to this benignant influence of peace which we enjoy in communion with God! May no power or force in us own anything but Himself! In all things may He be our all, so that He only may rule in our hearts!

He has brought us perfectly into this place of blessedness in Christ and by His work. There is nothing between us and God but the exercise of His love, the enjoyment of our happiness, and the worship of our hearts. We are the proof before Him, the testimony, the fruit, of the accomplishment of all that He holds most precious, of that which has perfectly glorified Him, of that in which He delights, and of the glory of the One who has accomplished it, namely, of Christ, and of His work. We are the fruit of the redemption that Christ has accomplished, and the objects of the satisfaction which God must feel in the exercise of His love.

God in grace is the God of peace for us; for here divine righteousness finds its satisfaction, and love its perfect exercise.

The apostle now prays that, in this character, God may work in us to make everything respond to Himself thus revealed. Here only is this

development of humanity given — "body, soul, and spirit." The object is assuredly not metaphysical, but to express man in all the parts of his being; the vessel by which he expresses that which he is, the natural affections of his soul, the elevated workings of his mind, through which he is above the animals and in intelligent relationship with God. May God be found in each, as the mover, spring, and guide!

In general the words "soul and spirit" are used without making any distinction between them for the soul of man was formed very differently from that of animals in that God breathed into his nostrils the breath (spirit) of life, and it was thus that man became a living soul. Therefore it suffices to say soul as to man, and the other is supposed. Or, in saying spirit, in this sense the elevated character of his soul is expressed. The animal has also its natural affections, has a living soul, attaches itself, knows the persons who do it good, devotes itself to its master, loves him, will even give its life for him; but it has not that which can be in relationship with God (alas! which can set itself at enmity against Him), which can occupy itself with things outside its own nature as the master of others.

The Spirit then wills that man, reconciled with God, should be consecrated, in every part of his being, to the God who has brought him into relationship with Himself by the revelation of His love, and by the work of His grace, and that nothing in the man should admit an object beneath the divine nature of which he is partaker; so that he should thus be preserved blameless unto the coming of Christ.

Let us observe here, that it is in no wise beneath the new nature in us to perform our duties faithfully in all the various relationships in which God has placed us; but quite the contrary. That which is required is to bring God into them, His authority, and the intelligence which that imparts. Therefore it is said to husbands to live with their wives "according to knowledge," or intelligence; that is to say, not only with human and natural affections (which, as things are, do not by themselves even maintain their place), but as before God and conscious of His will. It may be that God may call us, in connection with the extraordinary work of His grace, to consecrate ourselves entirely to it; but otherwise the will of God is accomplished in the relationships in which He has placed us, and divine

intelligence and obedience to God are developed in them. Finally God has called us to this life of holiness with Himself; He is faithful and He will accomplish it. May He enable us to cleave to Him, that we may realise it!

Observe again here, how the coming of Christ is introduced, and the expectation of this coming, as an integral part of christian life. "Blameless," it says, "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The life which had developed itself in obedience and holiness meets the Lord at His coming. Death is not in question. The life which we have found is to be such when He appears. The man, in every part of his being, moved by this life, is found there blameless when Jesus comes. Death was overcome (not yet destroyed): a new life is ours. This life, and the man living of this life, are found, with their Head and Source, in the glory. Then will the weakness disappear which is connected with his present condition. That which is mortal shall be swallowed up of life: that is all. We are Christ's: He is our life. We wait for Him, that we may be with Him, and that He may perfect all things in the glory.

Let us also here examine a little into that which this passage teaches us with regard to sanctification. It is connected indeed with a nature, but it is linked with an object; and it depends for its realisation on the operation of another, namely, of God Himself; and it is founded on a perfect work of reconciliation with God, already accomplished. Inasmuch as it is founded on an accomplished reconciliation, into which we enter by the reception of a new nature, the scriptures consider Christians as already perfectly sanctified in Christ. It is practically carried out by the operation of the Holy Ghost, who, in imparting this nature, separates us — as thus born again — entirely from the world. It is important to maintain this truth, and to stand very clearly and distinctly on this ground: otherwise practical sanctification soon becomes detached from a new nature received, and is but the amelioration of the natural man and then it is quite legal, a return — after reconciliation — into doubt and uncertainty, because, though justified, the man is not accounted meet for heaven — this depends on progress so that justification does not give peace with God. Scripture says, "Giving thanks to the Father, who hath made us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." Progress there is, but it is not in scripture connected with meetness. The thief was meet for Paradise and went there. Such

views are an enfeebling, not to say destructive, of the work of redemption, that is, of its appreciation in our hearts by faith.

We are then sanctified (it is thus the scripture most frequently speaks) by God the Father, by the blood and the offering of Christ, and by the Spirit — that is to say, we are set apart for God personally and for ever. In this point of view justification is presented in the word as consequent upon sanctification, a thing into which we enter through it. Taken up as sinners in the world, we are set apart by the Holy Ghost to enjoy all the efficacy of the work of Christ according to the counsels of the Father: set apart by the communication of a new life, no doubt, but placed by this setting apart in the enjoyment of all that Christ has gained for us. I say again, It is very important to hold fast this truth both for the glory of God and for our own peace: but the Spirit of God in this epistle does not speak of it in this point of view, but of the practical realisation of the development of this life of separation from the world and from evil. He speaks of this divine development in the inner man, which makes sanctification a real and intelligent condition of soul, a state of practical communion with God, according to that nature and to the revelation of God with which it is connected.

In this respect we find indeed a principle of life which works in us — that which is called a subjective state: but it is impossible to separate this operation in us from an object (man would be God if it were so), nor consequently from a continual work of God in us that holds us in communion with that object, which is God Himself. Accordingly it is through the truth by the word, whether at first in the communication of life, or in detail all along our path. “Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.”

Man, we know, has degraded himself. He has enslaved himself to the lusts of the animal part of his being. But how? By departing from God. God does not sanctify man apart from the knowledge of Himself, leaving man still at a distance from Him; but, while giving him a new nature which is capable of it, by giving to this nature (which cannot even exist without it) an object — Himself, He does not make man independent, as he wished to be: the new man is the dependent man; it is his perfection — Jesus Christ exemplified this in His life. The new man is a man dependent in his

affections, who desires to be so, who delights in, and cannot be happy without being so, and whose dependence is on love, while still obedient as a dependent being ought to be.

Thus they who are sanctified possess a nature that is holy in its desires and its tastes. It is the divine nature in them, the life of Christ. But they do not cease to be men. They have God revealed in Christ for their object. Sanctification is developed in communion with God, and in affections which go back to Christ, and which wait for Him. But the new nature cannot reveal an object to itself; and still less could it have its object by setting God aside at its will. It is dependent on God for the revelation of Himself. His love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost whom He has given us; and the same Spirit takes of the things of Christ and communicates them to us. Thus we grow in the knowledge of God, being strengthened mightily by His Spirit in the inner man, that we may “comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge,” and be filled unto the fullness of God. Thus, “we all with open face beholding the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.” “For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified through the truth.”

We see by these passages, which might be multiplied, that we are dependent on an object, and that we are dependent on the strength of another. Love acts in order to work in us according to this need.

Our setting apart for God, which is complete (for it is by means of a nature that is purely of Himself, and in absolute responsibility to Him, for we are no longer our own, but are bought with a price, and sanctified by the blood of Christ according to the will of God, who will have us for His own), places us in a relationship, the development of which (by an increasing knowledge of God, who is the object of our new nature) is practical sanctification, wrought in us by the power of the Holy Ghost, the witness in us of the love of God. He attaches the heart to God, ever revealing Him more and more, and at the same time unfolding the glory of Christ and all the divine qualities that were displayed in Him in human nature, thus forming ours as born of God.

Therefore it is, as we have seen in this epistle, that love, working in us, is the means of sanctification (chap. 3:12, 13). It is the activity of the new nature, of the divine nature in us; and that connected with the presence of God; for he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God. And in this chapter 5 the saints are commended to God Himself, that He may work it in them; while we are always set in view of the glorious objects of our faith in order to accomplish it.

We may here more particularly call the reader's attention to these objects. They are, God Himself, and the coming of Christ: on the one hand, communion with God; on the other, waiting for Christ. It is most evident that communion with God is the practical position of the highest sanctification. He who knows that we shall see Jesus as He now is, and be like Him, purifies himself even as He is pure. By our communion with the God of peace we are wholly sanctified. If God is practically our all, we are altogether holy. (We are not speaking of any change in the flesh, which can neither be subjected to God nor please Him). The thought of Christ and His coming preserves us practically, and in detail, and intelligently, blameless. It is God Himself who thus preserves us, and who works in us to occupy our hearts and cause us continually to grow.

But this point deserves yet a few more words. The freshness of christian life in the Thessalonians made it, as it were, more objective; so that these objects are prominent, and very distinctly recognised by the heart. We have already said that they are God the Father, and the Lord Jesus. With reference to the communion of love with the saints as his crown and glory, he speaks only of the Lord Jesus. This has a special character of reward, although a reward in which love reigns. Jesus Himself had the joy that was set before Him as sustainment in His sufferings, a joy which thus was personal to Himself. The apostle also, as regarded his work and labor, waited with Christ for its fruit. Besides this case of the apostle (chap. 2), we find God Himself and Jesus as the object before us, and the joy of communion with God — and this, in the relationship of Father — and with Christ, whose glory and position we share through grace.

Thus it is only in the two epistles to the Thessalonians that we find the expression “to the church which is in God the Father.”* The sphere of their communion is thus shown, founded on the relationship in which they

found themselves with God Himself in the character of Father (1 Thessalonians 1:3, 9, 10; 3:13; 4:15, 16; and here v. 23). It is important to remark, that the more vigorous and living Christianity is, the more objective it is. It is but saying that God and the Lord Jesus have a greater place in our thoughts; and that we rest more really upon them. This epistle to the Thessalonians is the part of scripture which instructs on this point; and it is a means of judging many a fallacy in the heart, and of giving a great simplicity to our Christianity.

[* Perhaps too in connection with their recent deliverance from idols to the one true God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.]

The apostle closes his epistle by asking for the prayers of the brethren, saluting them with the confidence of affection, and adjuring them to have his epistle read to all the holy brethren. His heart forgot none of them. He would be in relationship with all according to this spiritual affection and personal bond. Apostle towards all of them, he would have them recognise those who labored among them, but he maintained withal his own relationship. His was a heart which embraced all the revealed counsels of God on the one hand, and did not lose sight of the least of His saints on the other.

It remains to take notice of one interesting circumstance as to the manner in which the apostle instructs them. He takes, in the first chapter, the truths which were precious to their heart, but were still somewhat vaguely seized by their intelligence, and as to which they were indeed fallen into mistakes, and employs them (in the clearness in which he possessed them himself) in his practical instructions, and applies them to known and experienced relationships, that their souls might be well established on positive truth, and clear as to its use, before he touched on their error and the mistakes they had made. They waited for His Son from heaven. This they already possessed clearly in their hearts; but they would be in the presence of God when Jesus comes with all His saints. This was clearing up a very important point without directly touching the error. Their heart got straight as to the truth in its practical application to what the heart possessed. They understood what it was to be before God the Father. It was much more intimate and real than a manifestation of terrestrial and finite glory. Further they would be before God when Jesus came with an His saints; a simple truth which demonstrated itself to the heart by the

simple fact that Jesus could not have some only of His assembly. The heart seized this truth without an effort; yet in doing so it was established, as was the understanding also, in what made the whole truth clear, and that in view of the relationship of the Thessalonians to Christ and those that were His. The joy even of the apostle in meeting them all (those who had died consequently, as well as the living) at the coming of Jesus, placed the soul on an entirely different ground from that of being found here, and blessed by the arrival of Jesus when they were here below.

Thus enlightened, confirmed, established, in the real bearing of the truth which they possessed already, by a development of it which connected itself with their best affections and with their most intimate spiritual knowledge, founded on their communion with God, they were ready with certain fixed basis of truth to enter on and set aside without difficulty an error which was not in accord with what they now knew how to appreciate at its just value, as forming part of their moral possessions. Special revelation made all clear as to details. This manner of proceeding is very instructive.