

**THE MYSTERIES
OF THE
KINGDOM
OF HEAVEN**

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F.W. Grant



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FOREWORD

In First Corinthians 10:32, the Spirit of God draws attention to the three classes, generally speaking, in this present age: the Jews, the Gentiles, and the Church of God. Throughout Scripture, too, He distinguishes between the Church and the Kingdom. The necessity of “rightly dividing the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), and thus clearly defining the various classes and the differing spheres, is of prime importance in understanding the purposes of God for this present age and the one to come.

Perhaps nothing has ever been so helpfully written to give the student of the Word of God an understanding of the Scriptures in this regard, as *The Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven* by brother F.W. Grant. Having been out of print for some time, we feel led of the Lord to make it available once again to the people of God, with prayer for blessing on these timely and important lines of truth.

—Donald T. Johnson, 1969

*Chapter 1***WHAT THE KINGDOM IS**

There is perhaps no term in Scripture so largely used and so little understood as that of “the kingdom of heaven.” Yet its importance must be, in some measure at least, proportionate to the frequency of its use. It is only found in one book—the Gospel of Matthew—though there thirty-one times. The kindred expression, “the kingdom of God,” is used much more extensively, and in some parables in other Gospels is found in its stead. Taken together, these expressions have a very large place in the New Testament, and their interpretation will correspondingly affect a great deal of Scripture. I therefore offer this serious examination of the doctrine of the kingdom as covered by these terms, and an inquiry into the practical bearing of the doctrine, which there must assuredly also be, for “all Scripture ... is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

“The kingdom of heaven” is a New Testament term, but it has its roots in the Old Testament. The idea is found in seed form in Daniel in the prophet’s words to Nebuchadnezzar, who, effectually humbled by his time among the beasts, should learn by it that “the *heavens do rule*” (Daniel 4:26). This is expanded afterward into the thought that “the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will” (Daniel

4:32). Here we only have the *idea*, however: the rule of *God*, necessarily supreme over men. Here there is no thought of a special, limited, dispensational kingdom. This “dominion,” as the king himself says, “is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation” (Daniel 4:34).

“THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES”

The book of Daniel carries us further than this in the direction we are seeking. Both historically and prophetically, it has for its scope “the times of the Gentiles”—the Gentile supremacy over Israel which the Lord speaks of in Luke 21:24. But this is the consequence of her sin and of God’s controversy with her, and it means the interruption of His own dwelling in her midst as He did of old, and as He yet will do. For Jerusalem shall yet be, saith the Lord, “the place of My throne, and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever” (Ezekiel 43:7).

The “place of His throne” had been given up before Nebuchadnezzar could lay waste the city and the temple, and therefore a notable change is found in the Old Testament books which give us the history of that solemn and important time. The ark had been the symbolic throne of Him who “sitteth between the cherubim,” and as “the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth” it had passed through Jordan to take possession of the land (Joshua 3:11). Now the glory had left its dwelling place on earth, as Ezekiel had seen (Ezekiel 10:18; 11:23), and the very decree which ordains the rebuilding of the temple is that of a Persian king to whom the “God of *heaven* has given all the kingdoms of the earth” (2 Chronicles 36:23; Ezra 1:2).

This is no mere casual expression. It is characteristic of the books of the captivity—of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel. Al-

though the eternal throne of God can never be given up, yet a dispensational throne is now removed. This is what characterizes the times of the Gentiles: a responsible throne on earth which is set up by God, but yet is not God's throne—not the kingdom of God. Men must wait for the kingdom of God, but in hope, for the kingdom of God shall come.

Daniel accordingly shows us the end of these Gentile empires, and a wholly different one beyond them all: "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Daniel 2:44).

This is in Nebuchadnezzar's vision, but the features of this final kingdom he is not able to see more distinctly. The vision granted later to the prophet (Daniel 7) develops, as we may easily see, the spiritual significance both of the Gentile powers and of that which supersedes them. To the king, the image has the form of a man, though with no breath of life in it; though there is brilliancy, there is also increasing degeneracy. But to the prophet's eyes there is no human form, no unity; though there is plenty of life and vigor, it is bestial. On the other hand, as to the final kingdom, though not much is seen as to detail, one newly-given feature is of the sweetest encouragement. It is that the government is in the hands of One like a *son of man*, under whom the saints too possess the kingdom.

Here, then, is a "kingdom of heaven"—a heavenly rule on earth, a final world-wide triumph of righteousness and peace. We recognize it as that of which all the prophets speak, the expansion of the first prophecy of the victory of the woman's Seed, the unforgotten goal and purpose of the ages.

THE KINGDOM ANNOUNCED

Old Testament prophecy soon comes to an end after the voice in Daniel has uttered itself. There is a long pause of expectancy, and then one who is “more than a prophet” takes up the burden of those many years past, and announces that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. But the people are not ready, and the voice is of one crying in the wilderness—a priest who has forsaken the sanctuary and stands apart from men. The baptism of repentance must precede the remission of sins. The mountain must be leveled with the plain so that the way of the Lord may be prepared.

Then there is another Voice, and He who was announced is come. The kingdom is presented, now with the signs and powers which make good its claim and are ready to establish it among men. Nothing is missing, except, alas! the loyal hearts that should greet their divine King; here is a lack that nothing can compensate for. The more fully He is manifested, the more fully He is rejected. He finds in a Gentile the faith He cannot find in Israel (Matthew 8:10), and thereupon declares that many shall come from the east and the west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness with wailing and gnashing of teeth.

THE KING REJECTED

It is not necessary here to trace the steps of His rejection. The twelfth chapter of Matthew shows it to be already complete. His mighty works, stemming from and deeply filled with the power and love of God, they ascribe to Beelzebub, and He warns them that for blasphemy against the Holy Ghost there is never forgiveness. They sought signs, but none should be given

to them but the sign of the prophet Jonah—the Son of Man three days and nights in the heart of the earth. The chapter ends with the solemn disowning of natural ties: whosoever did the will of His Father in heaven, the same was His brother and sister and mother.

This introduces the thirteenth chapter, in which seven parables give us the prophetic character of the kingdom of heaven as it now is—the King rejected and away. Instead of finding fruit in His vineyard, He goes forth to sow the seed of fresh fruit among the Gentiles. Speaking in parables, because hearing they heard and understood not, He instructs His disciples in the “*mysteries* of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 13:11): that is, in things not forming part of what had been revealed in Judaism—things which had been kept secret from the foundation of the world (Matthew 13:35).

TWO FORMS OF THE KINGDOM

In these parables we see that while the essential idea of the kingdom of heaven is preserved, the form of it is widely different. It is still a kingdom of *heaven*, and in the hands of the Son of Man. However, it is not yet established in power, but committed into the hands of men who fail in the administration of it. Thus there is disorder and a possibility of evil even in high places, with purging and rectification needed when the King comes in power: “The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity” (Matthew 13:41). The mysteries of the kingdom thus terminate in its manifestation. The kingdom and *patience* of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:9) looks on to His kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12), when the fruits of the present sowing-time are harvested.

These two forms of the kingdom of heaven need to be carefully distinguished, which the Lord's address to Laodicea does very plainly: "Him that overcometh will I give to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne" (Revelation 3:21). He is seen in these addresses as Son of Man. Therefore, His *own* throne is clearly what is His as Man in contrast with the *Father's* divine throne. While His saints are promised to sit with Him upon the one, none could sit upon the other but One who is Himself divine.

The Lord, then, has a present kingdom, but in it we can only serve and not reign. We are "translated into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Colossians 1:13). The time for Christians to reign cannot be yet; we cannot reign until He takes the kingdom in the form shown in the Old Testament—until He comes and reigns publicly as Son of Man.

It is with His present kingdom that we are now occupied. This is established in a very different way: namely, by the sowing of the seed—"the *Word* of the kingdom." The kingdom extends no further than the extent to which this is, in some way, "sown in the heart." Yet it may not be sown unto salvation; it is the sphere of profession and privilege that is before us. The devil may take away that which was sown in the heart. The man may have no root in himself, the heart being a "heart of stone." Or the springing up of what is native to the soil may choke the good seed so that it is unfruitful. By and by, the enemy also sows tares among the wheat. All this is a picture of the kingdom.

There are also other aspects of it. We may be called, as in the last three parables of this series, to look at the divine plan and purpose, which cannot fail to be accomplished. However, from the human side, there is always with it the idea of condition, of possible failure, of a mixture of evil with the good, and

of coming judgment needed to rectify this. If the idea of mercy comes in, it is still conditional and never pure grace, as seen in the parable which closes the eighteenth chapter.

The King is away, and the administration is in the hands of man in the meantime. This accounts for most of the characters we are considering. It is the distinctive, fundamental feature of this “mystery”-form of the kingdom of heaven, and we will thus examine it more attentively.

Chapter 2

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

The kingdom in its present form is established and ruled by the *word* of an absent King. Being absent, it is clearly His word which speaks for Him—which represents His authority. His kingdom is a kingdom of truth, according to His own words to Pilate, who asked Him, “Art Thou a king, then?” He answered, “Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should *bear witness* unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice” (John 18:37).

“Master,” or “Teacher,” and “Lord” are necessarily associated in thought: “Ye call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am” (John 13:13). “Master” implies an authority, in Him absolute, and in this full sense He says to His disciples, “One is your Master, even Christ” (Matthew 23:8). To receive His word is thus to bow to His authority. His word is, as in the parable (Matthew 13:19), “the word of the kingdom.” His subjects are thus nothing else than His disciples, and discipling is now *into* the kingdom of heaven: “every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven,” literally means “discipled” (Matthew 13:52).

THE SPHERE OF DISCIPLESHIP

In the parables of the kingdom we find pictured the sphere

of discipleship embracing true and false alike. There are tares and wheat, good and bad fishes, wise and foolish virgins, guests that have not on the wedding garment, and servants that have never truly served at all. The end declares the difference, and in the end the Son of Man purges out of His kingdom all things that offend and them which do iniquity. Until the harvest comes—the end of the “age,” not “world”—the tares and wheat, the good and the evil, are found together.

The kingdom, then, covers the whole field of profession. Those in it may or may not be what they assume to be. Thus the blessings of it are accordingly conditional. People may enter it in two ways; there is an outer and an inner sphere, as it were, in the kingdom itself. There is a mere outward belonging to it, though not in heart, and there is an inward and real entering in, to which salvation attaches: “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Here it is not merely a “Lord, Lord,” but a true subjection of soul to Him.

All this will come out more as we go on with our subject. Yet it is well to realize it at the outset, for it makes simple much that otherwise would be dark and difficult. The conditional nature of everything is in accord with the general idea of a kingdom where government, though it be gracious, is not yet pure grace; where grace *is* shown, it is not in setting aside the requirement, but in enabling its fulfillment. This is how the children of God, as subjects of the kingdom, manifest themselves. There is a whole class of passages in Scripture which, speaking in this manner, are often misread in two opposite ways: by those who would maintain the full reality of divine grace toward men, and those who refuse it. The one class would take Paul’s expression, “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest ... when I have preached to others I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor-

inthians 9:27), as meaning only that his service might be disapproved, while the other will have it that Paul here fears for his ultimate salvation. Neither view is correct: the term "castaway" is translated "reprobate" in 2 Corinthians 13:5-7, and it is of the reality of his profession that he speaks, and not merely of his service. The New Testament assures us in its whole testimony in many concurrent lines of careful teaching, that true Christians "are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (Hebrews 10:39).

BINDING AND LOOSING

The kingdom of heaven, then, in the form in which we are now considering it, is a kingdom of the truth, and its true disciples are manifested by subjection to that truth. We are now to look at it as committed into the hands of men while the Lord is absent. It is plain that He uses men to minister "the word of the kingdom," and that a certain administration of its affairs is intended in the words, "whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven," and "whose sins ye remit, they are remitted to them." We shall inquire into the nature and limit of these assurances, but it is unmistakable that the disciples are in some sense commissioned to represent their Lord.

The first of these we find for the first time in a promise given to Peter, when in the midst of nearly universal unbelief he confesses his faith in Christ as the Son of the living God. "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona," replies the Lord, "for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound

in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:17-19). The keys of the kingdom are symbolic of authority over it, and the Lord uses almost the same language of Himself in the address to Philadelphia: “He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth” (Revelation 3:7). He denounces the Pharisees for shutting up the kingdom of heaven against men: “Ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in” (Matthew 23:13). To the lawyers He says similarly: “Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the *key of knowledge*: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered” (Luke 11:52).

All this agrees with what we have seen before—that the kingdom is a kingdom of the truth. Thus the key speaks of entrance into the kingdom, and entrance into such a kingdom is by the key of knowledge. Thus the key speaks of the power of discipling. The power of binding and loosing, according to the Rabbinical writings, belonged to and described the office of a teacher. “The Rabbi set apart to ‘loose or bind’ might authoritatively declare what was binding on the conscience and what was not; and in Talmudical writings, the phrase continually recurs by which a teacher or a school is said to *loose* or to *bind*,—i.e., to declare something obligatory or non-obligatory” (Edersheim’s *History of the Jewish Nation*, p. 405.) It is plain, then, that if the power of the keys speaks of discipling—of entrance into the kingdom—that binding and loosing applies to the regulation of the conduct of those already admitted or disciplined. The latter naturally connects itself with the former, and follows it.

There remains the question, Was the power of the keys personal to Peter only? The Romanist, it is well known, not only makes him the rock upon which the church is built, but gives

him in a special way the keys of heaven. The church is, however, as distinct from the kingdom as the *kingdom* of heaven is from heaven itself. It is well to remark that the promise limits itself to *earth* as the sphere of this binding or loosing. "Whatsoever thou shalt bind *on earth*" does not mean "whatsoever thou, being on earth, shalt bind," but just what it says. The earth is only where the binding applies, and "shall be bound in heaven" means simply that heaven being the seat of authority for the kingdom, it would confirm the act of its representatives on earth. On earth, and for earth alone is there this power, though he who rebels against it rebels against the authority of heaven. It is as where the Lord says, "He that receiveth you receiveth Me" (Matthew 10:40). The delegated power on earth represents the authority behind it.

But even for Rome, the keys belong not simply to Peter. There are successors to his chair. The Protestant view, in which they represent the power of administering the Word and sacraments, must of course admit others as participants in this. Nor need there be a doubt that as Peter's faith was but the faith of the other disciples, so they participate in this promise as well. As his energy makes him foremost in confession, so he also retains a foremost place throughout; at Pentecost he opens the kingdom of heaven to the Jews, and afterward he is chosen of God to open it to the Gentiles in the person of Cornelius. But we can scarcely think of these two instances as being the only use made of the keys of the kingdom. The power of binding and loosing which is also here explicitly promised to Peter, we find extended to others also in Matthew 18:18. If the power of the keys is the power of administration or of disciplining into the kingdom as we have seen, then the commission in the closing chapter explicitly extends this also: "And Jesus coming up

spoke to them, saying, All power has been given me in heaven and upon earth”—the kingdom was just ready to begin—“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” That successors are here contemplated is plainly taught in the closing words: “Behold, I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20 JND).

Thus the administration of the kingdom is committed to men. They are to initiate and receive others into it; they are to regulate it for and under Him. So completely is it intrusted to their care, that in the gospel of Mark the Lord represents the kingdom of God to be “as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, *he knoweth not how*” (Mark 4:26,27). It is not, of course, that His care over His people sleeps, but that outwardly things happen in that which is professedly in subjection to Him without any open interference on His part. “But when the fruit is brought forth” (or “ripe,” in the Revised Version) “immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come” (v. 29). So will He presently put in the sickle, for in spite of man’s doing, the harvest comes in its due season.

Yet in the meantime the kingdom takes strange shapes, and because it is true that He will have His harvest, and because it has been forgotten that the seed springs and grows up He knoweth not how, it has been taken for granted that if the kingdom of heaven is in the Word of God said to be “like” such and such things, “like” mustard-seed, or “like” leaven in a woman’s hand—this decides that all is *according to His mind*. In fact, it is far otherwise, for this expression, “He knoweth not how,” if it does not mean to convey, as we know it does not, any real ignorance, then it implies that the growth spoken of is strange and irregular, *as if* He knew not. So it is said, “The Lord *knoweth*

the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish" (Psalm 1:6). Of course He also knows the proud, yet to distinguish it from this approving knowledge it is added, "The proud He knoweth *afar* off" (Psalm 138:6).

So of the growth of His kingdom is in man's hand. It may be truly said, He knoweth it not, or He knoweth it afar off, which is no new thing when it comes to that which man has responsibility. Here the words of the Psalmist surely apply: "Man being in honor abideth not" (Psalm 49:12). Dispensation after dispensation has illustrated this rule, and no time has confirmed it more notably than the present.

Thus in the second parable of Matthew 13 it is "*while men slept*, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat" (Matthew 13:25). Thus, "while the bridegroom tarried," the whole company of professed watchers, wise as well as foolish, "*all* slumbered and slept" (Matthew 25:5). The history of this declension we shall look at, if the Lord will, at another time, for we have yet to more precisely see how the kingdom of heaven is entered and what the divine regulations for it are. To appreciate the disorder, we must first learn of all the order, for it is plain that God has not committed it to man's mere will, but rather to his charge. He is to bind and loose, not despotically, but as in subjection to the will of Another.

"BAPTIZING" AND "TEACHING"

The mere expression, "keys of the kingdom," shows clearly that there is a definite mode of entrance, and that the kingdom is not in its present form *territorial*, as the kingdoms of this world are. A Christianized country, for instance, is not any more a part of the kingdom of heaven than one that is not. Men do not come into it by natural birth, as they do into these. There

is a mode of entrance, a method of discipling, which is not in the hands of the men of this world, but only in the hands of disciples. There is a door by which to enter, and in which is their keeping.

Moreover it is a *double* door. There is not merely *a* key, but there are *keys* to it. We need not be afraid to insist upon the Lord's words in their full meaning. In fact, we are *bound* to insist upon this. His words are precise and require loyal acceptance; we must neither add to nor take away from them.

This sets aside what is often taken as explaining this commission to Peter that he was the first to preach the gospel to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, and to the Gentiles in the person of Cornelius afterward. That it does not take two keys to open the same door twice is plain. Also, the proclamation of the gospel to men outside is by itself no real *admission* of any. It is the offer of its blessedness, but men must be received individually, and for this a distinct form of admission is prescribed.

We have seen that the Lord speaks of the key of knowledge, that the kingdom is a kingdom of the truth, that its sphere is that of profession, and that people are disciplined into it. But the key of knowledge is plainly only one key, and we need yet another before the door will open. We find the other in the commission given by the risen Lord to the eleven after His resurrection, when He is about to ascend to the throne of the kingdom—all authority given to Him in heaven and in earth. He instructs them as to discipling the nations: for so it really reads, "Go ... and [*disciple*] all nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, *teaching* them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19,20).

Here there are two keys; “baptizing” and “teaching” are the joint methods of discipling. In the one we have the key of knowledge: in the other that which authoritatively admits one outwardly into the body of disciples upon earth. Without this latter there would be no proper recognition of the body as such, nor of individual relationship to it, nor representation of the King’s authority on earth.

Baptism is “into Jesus Christ” (Romans 6:3), “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:16), and a putting on of Christ (Galatians 3:27). It is a separation to Him as Master and Lord, as by the cloud and the sea the Israelites were marked off as followers of their divinely-appointed guide—“baptized unto Moses” (1 Corinthians 10:2). “*Unto* the name of the Lord Jesus”—not “in”—defines it as the recognition of His Lordship: of the throne as His. Thus Paul is exhorted by Ananias, “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, *calling on the Name of the Lord*” (Acts 22:16). Thus also in Ephesians 4:5, “one *Lord*, one faith, one baptism” are joined together.

As a “baptism into death,” Christ having died for us, it is a being “buried with Him by baptism into death ... that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead ... so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). It is thus for us the passing out of the old into a new condition, a change in which our sins are washed away. As the apostle said to the crowd on the day of Pentecost, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38), and to Ananias, “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins” (Acts 22:16).

“Whose soever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them,” the Lord had said before this (John 20:23). These words cannot be applied, as some would apply them, to the preaching of the

gospel. *We* do not, in the gospel, remit any one's sins. We do what is more blessed: we declare on God's part the terms upon which *He* remits. "Through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him *all that believe* are justified from all things" (Acts 13:38,39). It is the declaration of the forgiveness of a certain class, but it does not declare anyone to be of that class, or to have received the forgiveness. When a soul through grace believes the gospel and receives forgiveness—though it were I that preached it, it is still not from *me* that he receives it in any wise—it is not I that remits. Here is a thing in which God and the soul meet personally, and not by representatives. It is of the greatest possible importance to maintain this. It is just here that popery brings in her falsehoods and builds the Church up into a barrier wall to shut God out into the old darkness.

Disciples have no place in the administration of such forgiveness. They are no more the channel than the source of it. God has not given this glory of His to another; none can forgive sins but God alone. Let us only keep clear the distinction between heaven and the kingdom of heaven, and it will be impossible to make such mistakes as these. The kingdom of heaven is but the *shadow* of heaven upon earth. It witnesses to what is heavenly, finds its authority and sanction there, but remains still only the shadow. Useful and important in its place, it becomes only so much the more important that it retains that place. To confound the shadow with the substance is to degrade and displace both.

"I baptize with water," was John's answer to those who would have implied that, not being the Christ, to baptize was to invade His office. No use of *water* could possibly do that, and with water "Jesus Himself baptized not." No water can wash the soul; no spiritual transformation could be wrought by it. Divine power never works such marvels. The Creator uses His crea-

tion according to the sphere to which it belongs and for which He made it; Creator and Redeemer are but one blessed God. The mysteries of Babylon the great are no Christian mysteries, but magic. The perversion of truth manifests them as not from above but from beneath.

WATER BAPTISM—A FIGURE AND WITNESS

When, therefore, baptism is spoken of as for the remission of sins, and when the Lord says, “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them,” it is certain that He does not mean that the water of baptism has power to wash the soul. What then is this remission? To understand this we must recognize it as the entrance into the kingdom, that in which one is received out of the outside world into the ranks of Christ’s followers and subjects. It is plain that *ideally* the crossing of the line here is salvation—“The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us” (1 Peter 3:21). To cross the line in spirit is true salvation, and to this grand truth the whole figure witnesses. The controversy with the world is for the rejection of Christ; submission to Him means the controversy is over: “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). Yet the activity in salvation is all on His side; men baptize not themselves, but *are* baptized. This is the confession of guilt, of being under death; it is burial, yet to Christ, to His death. The power of life is not in baptism, but in Him to whom we are baptized: “Buried with Him by baptism into death: that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

There is thus really a witness to the gospel in baptism which is beautiful in its simplicity. No subtlety of understanding is needed for entering into it. No complexity of thought is here.

Man's guilt, helplessness, and need of the work of Christ are vividly portrayed and powerfully enforced in it, while the freedom and certainty of salvation are also fully declared, and the blessing appropriated on God's part to the one received. Will you have Christ for your Lord? Will you indeed take your place as His subject and disciple? Then here is remission of sins, here is salvation for you through the work of Christ which He accomplished for you. Now take your place among His disciples a saved man!

There is no doubt that He will receive you. He casts out none. As surely as you come, you are received. "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

Thus the preaching of baptism is a clear, simple, straightforward gospel, with good holdfast for the fingers of drowning men. There are no refinements, and there is no doubt. Only thus could it represent the salvation of Christ, which is yea only, and not yea and nay; it is rest and assurance, not rest and then doubt.

Then it is also evident that this is but the shadow—the *witness* of salvation—and not the salvation itself. Not all that are baptized are saved, though this stems not from uncertainty in the gospel terms, but only from uncertainty as to the reality in the soul of the disciple. In regard to many souls today, how much uncertainty must there be. This is expressly contemplated in those parables of the kingdom in which the mysteries of it are shown forth. Ten virgins go forth alike to meet the Bridegroom, but five of them are wise and five are foolish. The wedding is furnished with guests, but among them comes the one who does not have on a marriage garment. In the eighteenth chapter of

Matthew, at the close, this very matter of forgiveness is taken up, and we are taught in the person of the pitiless servant that forgiveness in the kingdom is not the full and absolute forgiveness which the gospel preaches, but conditional upon character. If the professed disciple turns out to not be one in heart, then the remission grounded on the basis of his profession becomes, in the end, no true remission. The blessings of the kingdom are all conditional and reversible.

Baptism, then, is admission into the kingdom of Christ, out of a world of sin which is lying in condemnation. It is reception among those to whom, as His own, remission belongs. But, as administered by man, the blessings and privileges of it must be received by faith or not received. This reconciles the fact that baptism is one of the keys with what the Lord says as to the necessity of conversion: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). This is indeed the necessity for the class to whom the Lord addresses Himself. Discipleship, if it be real, means no less than this. To enter into the kingdom is not merely to come into it in an outward way, but to come into it in spirit also: to really be subjects and followers of the Lord of the kingdom.

But this does not at all imply that people cannot be in the kingdom of heaven unless they are converted. The parables that the Lord uttered show tares are in it as well as wheat, and foolish virgins as well as wise. In the end of the age, the Son of Man will send His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all that offend, and them which do iniquity. Thus the kingdom will be freed, but they must first be in it in order to be gathered out.

Our Lord's words to Nicodemus, on the other hand, are re-

ally different, though I do not ground this upon its being the “kingdom of *God*,” of which He there speaks. While it is true that the kingdom of God gives a somewhat different aspect of what we are looking at, it is not a different thing. Parables of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew’s gospel are in the other gospels parables of the kingdom of God, including those of the leaven and the mustard seed. But what makes the words of John’s gospel different is that the Lord is speaking in them to a Jewish teacher with direct reference to Ezekiel’s prophecy of Israel’s conversion in the latter day (Ezekiel 36:24-26). This is how they will be brought in, with the sinners still remaining such being consumed out of their midst by judgment. Thus Isaiah speaks also of the time: “And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning” (Isaiah 4:3,4).

I do not for a moment question that the Lord’s words had a wider application than to Israel, but it is of the kingdom in its *future* state which He speaks, when that which offends and those who do iniquity are removed from it. A teacher in Israel should have known the absolute necessity of such a change as new birth for the enjoyment of the blessings the prophets had declared.

But now we must look more fully at the breadth of the kingdom, and its relationship to the Church, of which the Lord speaks to Peter in the words preceding those we have been seeking to explain.

WATER BAPTISM IS NOT BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

There is no need to produce further proof that the kingdom covers the whole profession of Christianity. A glance at the parables should settle this. But we have yet to see that it goes even beyond what we can properly call *profession to discipleship*: namely, the whole of the baptized.

Here I am reminded that in what I shall have to say, I must speak contrary to the convictions of many beloved brethren. I do not in the least make light of these, but sympathize fully with the strength of their feelings regarding the dishonor done to Christ, and the injury done to men's souls by current widely-held views as to baptism. Babylon the great has been built up by the use of bricks for stones and slime for mortar—the substitution of human manufacture for divine creation—of a “*sacramental* host of God's elect” for those “baptized by one Spirit into one body.” In the hands of these builders baptism has been made to build up a “great house” with vessels to dishonor, from which we are called to purge ourselves if we would be “vessels unto honor” (2 Timothy 2:20,21). Protest against this false ritualistic system can hardly go too far or be too strongly maintained.

The baptism of water has been confounded with the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and infants have been supposed to be regenerated by it and made partakers of a life that gave no sign and bore no fruit for God, and only deluded those who trusted in it. Then, as they could not say that every one so baptized was fit for heaven, they had to send a large part of these man-made children of God to hell, and most of the rest to purgatory to be purified by fire there. Yet, without this baptismal regeneration, supposedly not even a little babe could go to heaven.

The fundamental error here is twofold. First, in confound-

ing the natural and the spiritual spheres. Water cannot cleanse a soul nor impart spiritual life. It may be “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace,” but not “a means whereby we receive the same.” Secondly, in confounding heaven and the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of heaven and the Church. Protestantism has not, in general, escaped from this any more than Rome. The distinction between the two leaves a place of privilege and conditional blessing which is not the Church, and yet which is not the world either, except as it is untrue to its character or the principles of the world leaven it. This is what Scripture attests would happen, and what history shows has happened.

However, man’s unbelief cannot make the faithfulness of God without effect. The kingdom of heaven, with its message of peace and reconciliation, remains the testimony of a love which goes out to all, and would gather in to God wherever the will of man is not hardening itself in opposition. In Scripture we do not meet with that long delay of baptism, and that preparation of converts, which came in as baptism itself came to be looked upon as reception into the Church and the symbol of the full Christian state. In the New Testament the new converts were inside—not outside—the sphere of discipleship. Instead of being kept waiting at the threshold, the applicants were met with a generous and unsuspecting welcome. Three thousand were baptized on the day of Pentecost. How much preliminary instruction did they have? If, as at Samaria, a Simon Magus was received, with his heart not right in the sight of God, his reception had not defiled those tender arms of mercy which had been flung around him, and from which he had to burst to pursue the headlong path to everlasting ruin. I say, it is evident upon the face of Scripture that baptism was not then fenced around, as

many now would fence it round. It was a door which was, *not carelessly*, but readily and with a full heart, opened to the applicant. No question of Christ's heart, no "if thou wilt" was to be permitted.

But notice also that no hint of the Church of God is connected with this, with even its occurrence in Acts 2:47 in the common version being a copyist's error. The doctrine of the Church was revealed to Paul much later, and he who "received of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:23) as to the institution of the Lord's Supper, had no commission to baptize (1 Corinthians 1:17). In the first is involved the question of communion; in the second, the responsibility is only individual.

BAPTISM OF CHILDREN

This wider character of the kingdom we see further in our Lord's words as to the little children brought to Him. "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14) are words which become very plain when we have seen what the kingdom is. In these little ones is no resisting will, and divine love would lay hold upon them for its own. Once you see that the kingdom is not heaven, but a sphere of discipleship on earth, you can no more stumble at the thought of baptizing them than of taking them into your Sunday Schools. They belong, the Lord says, to His school at all times, and here He would meet them, put His hands on them, and bless them as when He did on earth. The great arms of the Redeemer will not even wait for their final choice of Him to be made manifest, but would win them, prevail upon them by their tender clasp, and mark them as His in *His* will, whatever even in the end may be *their own*. How precious is this thought of His, which then He turns to us to

help carry out: “Bring them up,” he says, “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

They are His disciples, taken into His school, and to be brought up for Him. Who would, as such, reject them? Is it not because of the superstition which has been connected with the thought, and the confusion between the kingdom and the Church, that so many now reject the baptism of infants as a popish figment, while they would do for them gladly the very thing which baptism implies, and rightly think it anything but popish?

Let us remember that baptism is not to take them to heaven as a charm, but to mark them as belonging to Christ’s school on earth. As far as it goes, it is “baptism unto *death*,” not life; it is burial, putting the dead in death, where they belong. In that touching confession of their need, by baptizing them “unto Christ” and “to His death,” we own that we are looking for all to come to them, not from the water, but from Christ, through His work for them. I cannot find in this one shred of popery or superstition. It is only the sweet and suited, open and apparent action of One who says in it what He says of old: “Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven”—words that charm our hearts, beloved brethren, and command our allegiance.

This character of the kingdom, then, is a beautiful one, in that it represents to us the very character of Him who is on the throne of it, the grace that casts out none that come, and that would gladly receive even those who will eventually break away from its shelter. Yes, such is the love of Jesus, and while I own the difference of the dispensation, and do not want to press uncertain analogies, yet it seems only the *more* suited that He, who in the days of law recognized the children of His people

through the mark of circumcision, should not now leave them without some corresponding mark. The confusion and evil in His kingdom cannot affect the grace of it, or make it less certain that it is His kingdom. When, finally, the limit of His patience has been reached, it will still be love that will act; the rod of iron will be the Shepherd's rod.

But we must now consider more attentively the distinction between the kingdom and the Church.

THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH

Perhaps to most Christians, even at the present day, the kingdom and the Church are one. The Church practically is the whole body of professors: what else is the kingdom? They would not deny that these are different aspects—that the thought connected with each is different—but believe they are only different aspects of the same thing. We have now, then, to consider how far this difference extends—whether it be only of thought, or of the things themselves.

We have seen the kingdom to be the sphere of discipleship. The Church is, in its fundamental idea, the body of Christ—the unity of His members. Notice that the action of the Spirit by which we are brought into this body is called “baptism”: “by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). Scripture, by adopting this word in this connection, institutes a comparison between the kingdom and the Church. But the one baptism is an external rite, and the other is inward and spiritual. The error of linking the two spheres has led to that of linking the two baptisms. However, the one is in the hand of man, and the other in the power of God alone.

The Church is not only the body of Christ: it is also the house of God, and under this figure of a house the Lord first speaks

of it in the gospels—"Upon this rock I will *build* My Church." Peter, taking up and extending the Lord's words, shows us this building and its foundation clearly: "To whom coming, as unto a Living Stone.... Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:4,5). But it is Paul to whom the doctrine of the body of Christ was committed, who first explicitly calls the Church, as indwelt by the Holy Ghost, the house and the temple of God (Hebrews 3:6; 1 Corinthians 3:17). Just as the Church is in the kingdom, which is yet wider and external to it, so was the temple to its outer court. In the former, the priestly family drew near and worshipped; in the other alone, the Israelite of the common people. Peter identifies, as it were, the house and the priesthood: "a spiritual house, a holy priesthood."

The house and body were, in God's design, and for a short time at the beginning, exactly commensurate. The one was composed of living stones, the other of living members. But men with their bad building have done as was foretold: they have unduly enlarged the house. They have built in "wood, hay, stubble" (1 Corinthians 3:12-17). Thus the house is become as "a great house," in which there are "vessels of gold and of silver of wood and of earth; and some to honor and some to dishonor" (2 Timothy 2:20). It will be purged from its disorder only when the Master comes.

In the kingdom, then, we have individual responsibility, conditional blessing, and a place of privilege to which man has authority to introduce his fellow. In the Church we have a place of absolute grace, relationship to one another, and communion. Here belongs another institution which expresses this. Paul, the special apostle of the Church, to whom it was given to complete the doctrine of it, was not sent to baptize (1 Corinthians 1:17). But he has, by distinct revelation from the Lord, given the insti-

tution of the memorial feast, in which not only do we symbolically “eat the Lord’s flesh and drink His blood,” but in which also it is expressed that “we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:17; 11:24).

Baptism and the kingdom speak of conditional blessing and individual responsibility; the Church, and the breaking of bread, of already-enjoyed (therefore absolute) grace, fellowship in it, and relationship to one another and the Lord. The kingdom is the outer court of the sanctuary; the Church is the house of God—the sanctuary itself. The first affirms God’s desire toward all; the last is the espoused object of Christ’s unchanging love.

It may thus be seen why Paul, the “minister of the Church,” as we have seen in a special sense, claims to be also specially the minister of the gospel (Colossians 1:23), and to have as his peculiar mission “to preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 1:17), even as distinct from a commission to baptize. So he speaks of “my gospel” (Romans 16:25), associating with it the “mystery” of the Church. In fact, it is Paul who alone speaks plainly of justification and of our place in Christ. With the other inspired writers it is rather forgiveness, although I do not say that there are not passages which look beyond this.

In the kingdom, the twelve are to sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). Here we cannot imagine a thirteenth throne for Paul. The commission to baptize, we have seen, was given to them also, although Paul takes it up and acts upon it, as we all do since.

Paul thus completes—as the sense is in Colossians 1:25—the Word of God. The complete truth is given through him, and hence he preaches also the kingdom of God (Acts 20:25). We shall find all lines of truth in the epistles of the one who is

an example of the perfect grace of God. In a sense, he can bring out the truth of the kingdom with more distinctness because he is able to give along with it the full position and standing of the true believer.

Accordingly, nowhere so fully as in Paul's epistles do we find the warnings as to a fruitless profession with which we are so familiar. He who can say, "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace," can on that very account the more insist that "to whom ye *yield yourselves* servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness" (Romans 6:14,16). The freedom to which God has called us, and the power with which He endues us, now make the service of sin so unutterably solemn, because it is manifestly on man's part the *choice* of evil; it is man's will in rejection of the grace of God.

On the other hand, even he in the seventh chapter of Romans can still say, "The good that I would," "the evil which I would not" (v. 19), while of Christians characteristically it is said, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, *they* are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14). The true Christian, conscious of the grace of which he is the subject, and established in a place which is unchangeably his, is just the one who submits himself joyfully to all the conditions of discipleship. This is what Paul does in those words of his so often misinterpreted: "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:26,27). He is here speaking as a disciple under the rules of the kingdom—as a disciple to disciples. But he not only knows how to tread the courts of the Lord; he knows how, as a priest, to enter the sanctuary also, and

to say, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Romans 8:33-35).

Here again, to keep the kingdom and Church distinct throws light upon the Word. Never will you find these conditions insisted on where it is a question of becoming a child of God, or of justification and the place in Christ, membership in the body of Christ, or anything which implies that divine grace has indeed wrought in the soul. All such conditions apply to the disciple, to the kingdom, and the court of the temple. The Church is the temple of God itself: the place of enjoyed nearness and settled relationship.

Before we close this, it will be well to notice how the apostle separates these different spheres in the fourth chapter of his epistle to the Ephesians. His seven unities there comprise and are divided into three concentric circles of blessing, of which he begins with the innermost and proceeds outward. The innermost circle is that of the Church: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." Next, we have that of the kingdom: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." Outside, again, is the world—not in the evil sense, but as the creation of God: "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:4-6). This is the Scripture classification which it has been our object to establish here.

*Chapter 3***SEED-SOWING AND
ITS RESULTS**

We have now seen what the kingdom is, and learned the general principles by which to interpret the parables in which the Lord was pleased to convey to us most of the instruction which we have concerning it. Of these we will first consider the seven parables of Matthew 13 in which we have its prophetic history from the seed sown by the Lord Himself to the end of the mystery-form with His appearing in the heavens. It is plain that this alone will close it, as this is what is contemplated in the parables themselves.

In the twelfth chapter the Lord, in announcing His death and resurrection, has declared the rejection of Israel. No further sign should be given them but the sign of Jonah the prophet; as Jonah had been three days and nights in the whale's belly, so the Son of Man would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Building upon this symbol, He shows what would be the result to that wicked generation which had rejected Him (Matthew 12:41-45). His new relationship would be with the doers of His Father's will, and with these alone (Matthew 12:46-50). This manifestly would exclude the nation of Israel in their unbelief, while it would bring in any and ev-

ery believing Gentile. Judaism, with its narrow restrictions, was therefore gone.

A significant action on the Lord's part introduces the parables of the thirteenth chapter. He leaves the house to sit by the seaside. Compare the picture of the woman that "sitteth upon many waters" (Revelation 17:1) to find the meaning of this. The angel interprets it for us in that chapter: "The waters ... where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues" (Revelation 17:15). So here the Lord is leaving the house, the place of recognized natural relationship, to take His place, as it were, in the highway of the commerce of the world, which the sea is. There, to the multitude upon the shore He begins His parable with "Behold, a sower went forth to sow."

But Israel had been His vineyard, long ago planted, fenced, and cared for according to His own words at another time (Matthew 21:33). From it He had looked for fruit—not a fresh field to sow for harvest. He had to "go forth" from Israel with that "word of the kingdom" which they had already rejected, in order to get fruit for Himself with it in the field of the world at large. For "the field is the world," as He Himself interprets to us; it is not a chosen nation, but the whole earth.

We are at once, then, brought face to face with what has been going on during the whole of the history of christendom. The results, as the Lord gives them here, are before our eyes. The seed is "the word of the kingdom" (Matthew 13:19), the declaration of the authority and power of One rejected and crucified as "King of the Jews." Raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, He sits upon the Father's throne, all authority in heaven and earth being given unto Him who is exalted to be "a Prince and a Saviour." This is the seed He sows, and the sowing is always His, though He may use others as His instruments.

The form the kingdom takes, therefore, is not yet as it will be; it will then be set up by almighty power to which everything must give way. It is offered for man's acceptance; it may be rejected. Faith is still to prepare the way of the Lord, and it is seen that "all men have not faith." In the kingdom yet to be upon the earth, predicted by the Old Testament prophets, a "rod of iron" will break down all opposition. Here, on the contrary, opposition shows itself at once in its three fundamental forms—as devil, flesh, and world—and three parts of the seed thus fail to bear fruit. Not only is there distinct and open rejection, but men may also receive the word outwardly, becoming subjects of the kingdom, but yet be quite unfruitful and merely self deceived. Thus the world of profession all around us is portrayed.

THE WAYSIDE HEARER

The first class represented here comes before us in the wayside hearer. In him the power of Satan is seen, though in such a manner as to leave the man himself fully responsible. It is solemn to read even of such an one, that the word was "sown in his *heart*" (Matthew 13:19). This does not imply conversion, for notice that he does not even "understand." Why? Because, as with the wayside, the ground on which it is sown is too hard-trodden for the seed to penetrate; it lies exposed to the birds of heaven, tempting, as it were, the tempter to "catch it away." There are many such souls preoccupied with what hardens and deadens them to other influences, be it business or pleasure—lawful or lawless. It is the effect that is noted here, little matter how it was produced.

Still the word is "sown in the heart." Marvelous power of the Word of God, which, wherever it speaks, carries with it something of its divine authority. The "inner man of the heart"

is reached and made aware of that which brings its own evidence and claims. “By manifestation of the truth,” says the apostle, “commending ourselves to *every* man’s conscience *in the sight of God*” (2 Corinthians 4:2). Not every man will admit how he winces under the truth, but he *does* wince. The soul that turns away from the light to darkness—the fit cover of evil deeds—is still conscious of the light.

Who that has ever listened to the Word can be a stranger to these moments of conviction? This does not require that the Word is understood in any proper sense; it is felt as light, detecting the thoughts and intents of the heart. The one who feels it and turns away from it falls thus under the devil’s power. The impression made is soon removed. The seed sown is caught away. The poor victim of Satan may even learn to laugh at the momentary conviction, and to congratulate himself upon the wisdom of his present indifference.

THE STONY GROUND HEARER

In the next class of hearers, the stony ground illustrates the opposition of the flesh. See that it is not pictured at its worst, but at its best. This man “heareth the word, and immediately with joy receiveth it; yet has he not root in himself” (v. 21). Here is not the natural man’s rejection of the Word, but his reception of it, though there is no more real fruit than in the first case. The seed has rapid growth, with the rocky bed forming a sort of natural hot-bed for it, so that it springs up quickly with abundant promise. But the very thing which favors this ready development forbids continuance. The seed cannot root itself in the rock, and the sun withers it up.

It is easy to see what is lacking here, and that the picture is of the stony heart of unbelief—unchanged, denying the Word

admittance, while seeming to receive it even more than others. There are many such cases where the gospel is apparently received at once and with joy, but where the *immediate* joy is just the sign of surface-work, and of unreality underneath. With such, the plowshare of conviction has never made way for the seed to penetrate. The work is mental and emotional only—not in the conscience. There has been no *repentance*, no bringing down into the dust in the consciousness of a lost, helpless, undone condition which nothing but the blood and grace of Christ can meet. There has been no turning away from self—self-righteousness and self-sufficiency—to Him.

Thus there is no root in the man himself; Christ is not his real and grand necessity. So “when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by he is offended.” This is the religion of the flesh, of sentiment, of unreality, and this is its end. It lacks permanence—the sign and seal of a truly divine work. It “dureth for *awhile*.” “I know that, whatsoever *God* doeth, it shall be for ever” (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

It should caution every workman who goes forth with the precious seed of the Word of God when there is such a hasty springing up of the Word he carries. In souls who are not exercised about their sin, it is not to be rejoiced in, but just the contrary. He should beware of an easy passage into joy and peace without any deep conviction—without any real taking the place of a lost sinner before God. It is not that experiences are to be preached or trusted in for peace; Christ alone is our peace, most surely. But we should nevertheless be admonished, that if Christ came “to seek and to save the lost” (and that is the gospel—“good news,” if any is) men must know that they *are* lost in order to receive this gospel message. This is the Scripture truth

and necessity of repentance: “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

THE THORNY GROUND HEARER

We come now to the third class of these hearers, to him “that received seed among the thorns.” The Lord interprets for us what is figured here as the opposition of the *world*: “the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the Word, and he becometh unfruitful” (v. 22).

It is a more solemn warning, perhaps, than either of the others. For here the Word seems to have a deeper hold, and it is not the violent assault of persecution that overthrows this faith, but the quiet influence of things which are, in one form or another, around us all. All of our lives only prove more or less how occupation with even needful and lawful things tends to become a “care” that saps the life of all that is of God within us. *Soul-care* is not despised, but just crowded out. We all feel the tendency, and we may all remember cases of those in whom the seed of the Word apparently was springing up and where, by no sudden assault or pressure of temptation—but just in the ordinary wear and tear of life, perhaps along with the unsuspected influence of material prosperity—the promise of fruit was choked like seed among thorns.

Let us carefully mark that, in all three cases, however fair the appearance, there was no “fruit.” In all cases, it was “faith,” which “having not work,” was dead, being alone. It wrought nothing for God in the souls of those that had it. It brought about no judgment of sin, no brokenness of heart, no turning to God. On the other hand, where these are, there is fruit, real faith, and eternal life; such shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of His hand in whom they have believed.

THE GOOD GROUND HEARER

Of the fourth class *alone* is it said, “He heareth the Word and *understandeth it*” (v. 23). This is the character of him who “received seed into the good ground,” and this man also “beareth fruit.” The understanding of the Word is thus the great point here. What puts us into a condition for understanding the gospel is just the understanding of ourselves. Our guilt, our helplessness—our full need apprehended by the soul—opens the way to apprehend the fullness and blessedness of the gospel message. If I am a sinner and powerless by any effort of my own to get out of this place, how sweet and simple it is that Jesus died for sinners, and that through Him God “justifieth the ungodly.” If I can do nothing, how that word, “to him that worketh not, but believeth,” shines out to my soul! I understand it. It suits me. It is worthy of God. There is no *good* ground prepared to receive the seed of the gospel save that which has been thus broken up by the conviction, not of sin only, but also of helplessness. “When we were yet without strength” came the “due time” in which “Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6).

The lessons of this parable are plain enough. It teaches that the kingdom is not established by power, but by the reception of the Word, which in an adverse world is not only rejected by some, but often unreal where it exists nominally. It shows that the kingdom is not territorial—that in its nature it is a kingdom of the truth whose subjects are disciples and the introduction to which is *disciplining*, and which grows by individual additions. So much is plain and it is the foundation of all that follows.

*Chapter 4***TARES AMONG THE WHEAT**

It is plain that the kingdom in its present form is *not* to be a universal one. It is widely distinguished from that which the prophets of the Old Testament picture. Left to man's reception of it, and not set up by the right hand of power, it is received by some, but rejected by many. Even where it is outwardly received, in many cases there is no real fruit for God. There are thus "children of the kingdom" who in the end, like those among Israel, are cast out of it. There is no fault with the seed or with the sowing of it, but the fault is entirely in the nature of the soil in which the seed is sown.

But that is not by any means the whole picture. We will now see not merely the ill success of the good seed, but the result of the introduction of seed of another character, sown by another hand—the sowing of the enemy himself. "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way" (Matthew 13:24,25). Thus, in the very midst of that which the first parable has shown us springing up—good wheat, although there may be many barren and blighted ears—the enemy sows, not wheat at all, but *tares*. In this case, it is clearly not the Word of Christ that is sown, but Satan's corruption of it. The springing up of the good

seed could not produce tares, nor could the father of lies preach truth. Hence, the test of a man's speaking by a good or evil spirit could be, "Every spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist" (1 John 4:2,3). The enemy of Christ ("His enemy," Matthew 13:25), even "as an angel of light," will not *hold up* Christ, for he knows too well what Christ is for souls. On the other hand, even when Christ was preached out of envy and strife, the apostle could rejoice in it (Philippians 1:15-18). But here it is not the "corn of wheat" (John 12:24), which would bring forth wheat if it sprang up at all, but "tares" that are sown. From this evil seed "tares" and nothing else spring up. What is "sown," in opposition through imitation of the truth, produces under a Christian name and dress a host of real enemies to the truth and to Christ: "children of the wicked one" (Matthew 13:38). These are not mere children of nature, however fallen, but the devil's own—begotten by *his* word, as God's children are by His.

Here, alas, we read of no hindrances: no opposition of hard-trodden ground, no catching away by the birds of the air, no underlying rock, and no choking by thorns. All circumstances favor this seed and its growth. It needs no nursing; it will thrive amid "cares of this world," and grow up in companionship with the "deceitfulness of riches." It is at home everywhere, and any soil is congenial to it, for its "wisdom" is not "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." It "descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish" (James 3:15).

So it prospers, and the children of God—even "the *servants*" (Matthew 13:27)—are slow to discern the true nature of what is being sown and growing up amongst them. It is sad and solemn

to see how lightly we think of error, for it is but another way of saying how lightly we value the truth. Yet we are begotten by the word of truth, and sanctified by the truth (James 1:18; John 17:17). It is this alone by which we know either ourselves or God. Regarding this perversion of the truth that the apostle said, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8): words which he emphatically repeats that we may be assured that it was no hastiness of ill-tempered zeal that moved him, but the true inspiration of the Spirit of Christ.

So then, the seed springs up and there are now tares among the wheat. How soon that began in the professing church! You may find Judaism, legalism, ceremonialism, and even the denial of the resurrection itself—the keystone of Christian doctrine—again and again among the churches of the apostolic days. What solemn warnings there are in the sure Word of God as to the future—a future long since present. "Even now are there many antichrists," wrote the last of the apostles, "whereby we know it is the last time" (1 John 2:18).

But for the sowing of these tares, those are responsible to whom the field has been intrusted. "*While men slept*, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat." *There* was the failure. In the case given in the first parable, they had not power to prevent the ill success of the Word of truth in men's hearts, or the hollowness of an external profession of the truth which yet had no proper root in the man who made it. All who "gladly received the Word upon the day of Pentecost" were baptized "the same day" (Acts 2:41). There was no waiting to see if, when tribulation came, they would endure—yet that was the real test for the stony-ground hearer. Such would "immediately with

joy” receive the Word, and also baptism, and so be added to the disciples. It was not failure on the part of the baptizers, for they could not read the heart. There each man stood on his own responsibility to God.

But it was a different thing when that which was *not* the Word, but Satan’s corruption of it, began to be sown in the very midst of disciples. How soon it became needful to write even to the little babes about Antichrist, and to exhort men “earnestly to contend for the faith which was *once* delivered to the saints” because of “certain men *crept in unawares* ... ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 3,4). Thus were the tares already manifested. “The children of the wicked one” were there. Christ was denied in His own kingdom. The question of His actual sovereignty was raised, and He must come in sovereignty and in judgment to decide that question; the servants are not competent to decide it. Regarding the tares, “The servants said unto Him, Wilt Thou, then, that we go and gather them up? But He said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them” (Matthew 13:29).

This is a solemn lesson from which we may learn much, while it does *not* teach what so many seem disposed to learn from it. Plainly, communion at the Lord’s table is not at all the question here, and it is nothing less than willful blindness to persist in this application of it in the face of the manifold Scriptures which contradict it. What meaning could “Put out from among yourselves that wicked person,” addressed to the church at Corinth, have for those who here learn from the lips of the Lord Himself, as they say, that tares and wheat are to grow up together in the church, and that it is vain and wrong to attempt any such separation? What then is the meaning of even their

own feeble efforts to put out some notorious offenders, if this be so? If this be to gather up tares, why attempt it in the case of even the worst, when the principle they maintain is not to do it at all?

GATHERING OF TARES IN ANGELS' HANDS

On the other hand, this passage does teach us that it is one thing to know and own the evil that has come in, and quite another to have power or authority to set things right again. Men sowed, and the tares were sown. No after-vigilance or earnestness could repair the mischief. The gathering up must be left for angels' hands in the day of harvest. "Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say unto the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into My barn" (v. 30).

Jude's remedy for the state of things is just the same. Of the ungodly men of whom he speaks as having crept in among the disciples, he says, "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, *prophesied of these*, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 14,15). Thus alone in the wheat field of christendom is the separation of the evil from the good effected. It is quite another thing, according to the apostle's word to Timothy (2 Timothy 2), to purge *ourselves* from the vessels to dishonor in the house; and this we are bound to do. The purging of the house itself the Lord alone will and can do.

Meanwhile, tares and wheat *do* grow together. No means of ours can ever efface or rectify the dishonor done to Christ in

christendom. No, not even the most zealous preaching of the gospel, however blessed the result, will ever turn the tares of Unitarianism, Universalism, annihilationism, popery, and what not, into good wheat for God's granary. Nor can we escape their being numbered with us as Christians in the common profession of the day. But while refusing to link ourselves with them to the dishonor of our Lord and Master, we cannot put ourselves outside the common profession of Christianity to avoid companionship with them there. Nor, even if we had the power, do we have the skill to infallibly separate the Lord's people, with many of them mixed up in most of the various forms of error. "The Lord knoweth them that are His" is our only comfort. He will make no mistake. "Behold, the Lord cometh," is the only available remedy for which faith looks concerning the state of things at large.

TARES GATHERED IN BUNDLES FOR BURNING

The separation which men's hands are thus declared incompetent for, remains for angels' hands in the day of the harvest of christendom. They are the reapers then. The field is to be cleared of wheat and tares alike; at one moment it is bidden both to gather the tares in bundles to be burnt, and to gather the wheat into the barn. Thus solemnly the day of Christian profession ends.

But let us look a little more closely at the order and manner of it, which is of the greatest importance in order to understand it rightly. "Gather together *first* the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them." There is no actual burning yet, and there is no removal from the field. It is a separation of the tares *in* the field, so as to leave the wheat distinct and ready for the ingathering. As to what manner this will happen, we must refrain from conjecturing; whether it will be gradually or suddenly ef-

fect, we do not know. However, the separation will be made, and the true people of the Lord will stand in their own distinct company when that day is come at last. Then will follow, *not* the removal of the tares, but of the wheat. The tares are left in bundles on the field; *the wheat is gathered into the barn.*

WHEAT GATHERED INTO HIS BARN

We know very well what this is, and how many joyful hopes are crowded into that brief sentence. The scene is pictured for us in 1 Thessalonians 4. The descent of the Lord into the air, the shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God; the resurrection of the dead in Christ, the myriads fallen asleep in Him through the ages of the past; the change of the living saints throughout the earth; the rise of that glorious company; the meeting, and the welcome; the henceforth “ever with the Lord”—all these are the various parts and features of that which these words figure to us: “Gather the wheat into My barn.” We know this will be suddenly: “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” this change will be effected. Every living saint will be gathered out of the length and breadth of christendom, and it will be left but a tare field simply, with its tares gathered and bound in bundles, ready for the burning.

There is a notion current among many who believe in the Lord’s coming that only those who are in a certain state of preparation among the saints then living will then be caught up, and that the rest will be left on earth to be purified by the tribulation which follows. See how this idea is completely contradicted by the words of the parable before us.

FALSE PROFESSOR FINALLY LINKED WITH THE TARES

Where are the barren and blighted ears of false profession?

Where is he of the stony ground? Where the man in whom the good seed of the Word was choked with the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and brought no fruit to perfection? We have seen that the “tares” do not refer to these, but to the fruit of Satan’s perversion of the Word; they are not those of whom the apostle speaks as “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof,” but rather they are those, whether teachers or taught, to whom apply the words of another apostle concerning “false teachers ... who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them,” and whose “pernicious ways” *many* shall follow, “by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of” (2 Peter 2:1,2). These are the tares of the devil’s sowing, and it is important to distinguish them from the mere formalist and unfruitful professor of the truth. It is on account of these, as both Peter and Jude tell us, that the swift and terrible judgment which ends the whole comes. “Enoch ... the seventh from Adam, prophesied *of these*, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all.”

Yet the formalist, the man of mere profession, will not escape. In the judgment of the *dead* before the great white throne they will receive according to their deeds as surely as any, but that is long after the scene before us in this parable. Here is a simple question of good wheat for the granary or of tares for the burning. Nothing else is in the field at all. There is no middle class, no unfruitful orthodox profession; all seem to have taken sides before the solemn close of the time of harvest, either manifestly *for* Christ, or as manifestly against Him. Is this indeed so? Do we have a warrant for such an interpretation of the language of the parable?

THE APOSTASY OF CHRISTENDOM

The answer to this is a very solemn one, and we shall find it in the second epistle to the Thessalonians. In the first epistle, the apostle had spoken of “the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him.” He had assured them that even the sleeping saints would be brought with Christ when He comes again (1 Thessalonians 4:14), and that in order to accompany Him on His return to earth they would be raised from the dead, and together with all the living ones of that day be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Thus, when He “appeared” to judge the world, they would appear with Him in glory (Colossians 3:4). He could therefore in His second epistle beseech the Thessalonian Christians, by their knowledge of this coming and this “gathering,” not to be shaken in mind, or troubled, as supposing or being persuaded that the day of the Lord had already come (2 Thessalonians 2:2 JND). That day (as all the prophets witness) is the day of the Lord’s taking the earth from under man’s hand and into His own, the time in which His judgments are upon the earth, and the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. That day, he assures them, shall not come unless there come a *falling away* (an apostasy) first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped.

THE ANTI-CHRIST

Now, my object is not any special application or interpretation of this. So much is manifest that this “man of sin,” whoever he may be, is one who heads up the apostasy of the latter days. The evil, the mystery of iniquity, was already at work even in the apostles’ days (2 Thessalonians 2:7). There was, however, for the present, a restraint upon it. When that should be removed, the

wicked one would be revealed, who was to be destroyed only by the Lord's coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

Thus we are evidently looking at the same period as that contemplated in the parable before us, as well as of the judgment which Jude warns of. The passage in the Thessalonians exhibits, however, the "man of sin" as the distinct head and leader of the latter-day apostasy and, moreover, declares to us how far this apostasy shall extend. The coming of the "wicked one" is declared to be with a terrible power of delusion which will carry away captive the masses of the unconverted among professing Christians until none of that middle or neutral class remain. "Whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong *delusion, that they should believe a lie*: that THEY ALL might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

Thus shall close the history of christendom. The true saints taken out of it, the door of grace will be closed forever upon those who have rejected grace. They will be given over to be changed, as they will speedily do, from being unbelievers of the truth to believers of a lie. With the wheat being gathered out of the field, tares alone will be found in it.

The actual burning of the tares is not found in the parable itself, but in the interpretation of it which the Lord afterward gives to His disciples. "As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing

and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:40-43).

THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN

This is when the Lord comes as *Son of Man* to take that throne which He has promised to share with His people. Only then, when the time of “patience” is over, shall the rod of iron break in pieces all resistance to the King of kings. Then “judgment,” long separated from it, “shall return unto righteousness,” and the earth shall be freed from the yoke of oppression and the bondage of corruption. It is the time of which the thirty-seventh Psalm speaks, when “evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth” (Psalm 37:9); when “yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be; but the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Psalm 37:10,11).

Sometime before this day the gathering for heaven will have taken place, and the saints have met their Lord, as we have seen. Now, in this day of the judgment, which prepares the way for the blessing of the earth, they are seen in their heavenly place. “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun.” Blessed words! which speak of their association with their Lord in other ways than simply as sharers of His rule with the “rod of iron.” For “unto you that fear My Name,” says the Word by Malachi to Israel, “shall the *Sun of Righteousness* arise with healing in His wings.” We know who bears that name, and how it speaks of earth’s nighttime passed away. But “when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.” So, as the Sun, shall the righteous shine forth in the kingdom of their Father. With Christ, and like Him, they shine: themselves

subject in one sphere, and rulers in another. Subject with all the heart's deep devotion, where service is fullest liberty, they serve as sons Him whom they call—at the same time—God and Father.

*Chapter 5***THE KINGDOM'S GROWTH**

Thus we have compassed the whole history of the kingdom of the absent One up to its solemn close in judgment at His coming. The next two parables take us back again to look at other aspects of the same scenes. These two parables have a commonality which distinguishes them from the former two in that they do not speak of individuals, but of the mass. They give us the outward form as well as the inward spiritual reality of what christendom as a whole becomes—of what it *has* become.

PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

“Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof” (Matthew 13:31,32).

Of this parable the Lord gives us no direct interpretation. It is stated, however, to be another similitude of the same kingdom spoken of by the former ones. As Scripture must ever be its own interpreter, and as we are certainly intended to understand the Lord's words here, we may be confident the key to its understanding is not far off. Let us consider the following

passage from the book of Daniel, and see if it does not furnish that key. The words are those of the king of Babylon: "Thus were the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth. The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and *the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof*, and all flesh was fed of it" (Daniel 4:10-12).

This is interpreted by Daniel to be speaking of the king himself: "It is *thou*, O king, that art grown and become strong" (Daniel 4:22). The figure, which appears elsewhere and always with the same meaning (see Ezekiel 17:5; 31:3-6), is that of worldly power and greatness. But the strange thing in Matthew 13 is that "the least of all seeds" should grow into such a tree. For the seed, here as elsewhere, is "the Word of the kingdom" (Matthew 13:19). We have already seen how men treated that Word. The kingdom of the Crucified could have but little attraction for the children of the men who crucified Him. Human hearts are sadly too much alike for that. How, then, could a great worldly power come from the sowing of the gospel in the world?

Granted that it *has* become this, is this a sign for good? How could "My kingdom is *not* of this world" correlate with this? What proper mastery of this world could there be—what overcoming of its evil with divine good—where three parts of the professed disciples were, according to the first parable, merely unfruitful hearers, and according to the second, Satan's tares had been sown among the wheat?

If we want plain words as to all this, we may find them in abundance. If, on the one hand, we know by what is around us

that professing Christianity has become a power in the world, we may know on the other, both by practical experience and the sure Word of God, that it has become such by making its terms of accommodation with the world. It has bought off the old, inherent enmity of the world at the cost of its Lord's dishonor by the sacrifice of its own divine, unworldly principles. He who runs may read the "Perilous times" of the latter days written upon the forefront of the present days (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Yes, the little seed has indeed become a tree, but the "birds of the air" are in its branches. Satan himself (compare verses 4 and 9) has gotten lodgment and shelter in the very midst of the "tree" of christendom. The "Christian world" is still the "world," and the "whole world lieth in the wicked one" (1 John 5:19 JND). In many cases, the opposition to Christ and His truth is now from within, instead of from without.

Rome is the loudest assertor of this claim of power in the world, and what has Rome not done to maintain her claim? Her photograph is in Revelation 17 and 18. Successor to the "tree"-like power of old Babel, she is called "Babylon the Great." She is judged as having made guilty alliance with the nations of the world, while professing to be the spouse of Christ: "For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies" (Revelation 18:3). Alas! along with the power of Israel's enemy, she has also inherited the old antipathy to the people of God: "I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration (Revelation 17:6).

This is the full ripe result. The beginning of it is already seen

at Corinth even in the apostle's day: "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.... We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honorable, but we are despised" (1 Corinthians 4:8,10). Thus early was the little seed developing; thus quickly did the Christianity of even apostolic days diverge from that of the apostles. Paul lived to say of the scene of his earliest and most successful labors, "All they which are in Asia be turned away from me" (2 Timothy 1:15). Thus widespread was the divergence. Men that quote to us the Christianity of one or two hundred years after that should pause and ask themselves what type of it they are following: whether that of degenerate Asia, or "honorable" worldly Corinth, or something else.

That is the external view, then, which this parable presents of the state of the kingdom during the King's absence. It had struck its roots down deep into the earth and flourished. Christendom is such a power in the world today. Beneath its ample cloak of respectable profession it has gathered in the hypocrite, the formalist, the unfruitful—in short, the world—and the deadliest foes of Christ and of His cross are those nurtured in its own bosom.

PARABLE OF THE THREE MEASURES OF MEAL AND LEAVEN

Next we go on to the other parable for a deeper and more internal view: "Another parable spake He unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened" (Matthew 13:33).

Now what is "leaven"? It is a figure frequently used in Scrip-

ture, and it will not be hard to gather up the instances to which it is applied and explained in the New Testament. We surely cannot go wrong in allowing it to interpret itself to us, instead of following our own conjectures.

The following, then, are *all* the New Testament passages. Matthew 16:6: “Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” In the twelfth verse this is explained: “Then understood they how that He bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the *doctrine* of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” The passages in Mark and Luke are similar (Mark 8:15 and Luke 12:1). In 1 Corinthians 5 the apostle is reproving them for their toleration of the “wicked person” there: “Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of *malice* and *wickedness*; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (verses 6-8). There the “leaven” is *moral* evil, as in the Gospels it was *doctrinal* evil. In Galatians 5, the only remaining passage, it is again doctrinal: “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law.... Ye *did* run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of Him that calleth you. A *little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*” (verses 4-9).

If we take Scripture as its own interpreter, it must be admitted that “leaven” is always a figure of evil, whether moral or doctrinal, and never of good. Yet, it is possible to define its meaning—and that of the parable—still more clearly. In this case, it is Leviticus 2 that furnishes us with the key. Among the offerings with which this book opens—all of them speaking of

Christ—the meat (or “food”) offering is the only one in which no life is taken, and no blood shed. It is an offering of “fine flour,” representative of Christ, not in the grace of His atoning death, but in His personal perfection and preciousness as the bread of life offered first of all as satisfying to God, and also for man: “He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me” (John 6:57).

Now it is with this meat-offering that leaven is positively forbidden to be mixed (Leviticus 2:11): “No meat offering, which ye shall bring unto the Lord, shall be made with leaven.” True to its constant use in Scripture as a figure of evil, that which was a type of the Lord Himself was jealously guarded from all mixture with it. Now in the parable, the “three measures of meal” are just this “fine flour” of the offering. The words are identical in meaning. The flour is man’s food, as the offering is, and thus interpreted spiritually can alone apply to Christ. But here the woman is doing precisely the thing forbidden in the law of the offering—she is mixing the leaven with the fine flour. She is corrupting the pure “bread of life” with evil and with error.

THE WOMAN

Who is this “woman” herself? There is meaning, surely, in the figure. He who remembers Ephesians 5 will want no proof that that figure is often that of the Church, the spouse of Christ. It may be also, as we have already seen, the figure of the professing body: Babylon the Great. In this sense, the whole parable itself is simple. It is the too fitting climax of what has preceded it; it is she who has drugged the cup in Revelation 17 for the deception of the nations, adulterating here the *bread* also. The “leaven of the Pharisees” (legality and superstition), the “leaven of the Sadducees” (infidelity and rationalism), and the “leaven

of Herod" (courtier-like pandering to the world)—things not merely of the past, but also of current history—have been mixed with and corrupted the truth of God. All must own this, whatever his point of view. The Romanists will say Protestants have done so; the Protestants will in turn accuse Rome; the myriads of jarring sects will tax each other; the heathen will say to one and all, "We know not which of you to believe, for each contradicts and disagrees with the other. Go and settle your own differences first, and then come, if you will, to us."

The leaven *is leavening the whole lump*. The evil is no way diminishing, but growing worse. No doubt God is working, and no doubt, as long as the Lord has a people in the midst of christendom, things will not be permitted to reach the extreme point. However, the tendency is downward, and once that restraint is removed, the apostasy which we have seen Scripture predict will then come.

But men do not like to think of this, and the question is often asked, "How can the *kingdom of heaven* be like leaven if leaven is always evil? Must not the figure here have a different meaning from that which you have given it? Must it not rather be a figure of the secret yet powerful influence of the gospel, permeating and transforming the world?"

Allow me to provide three answers to this question. First, this is contrary to the tenor of Scripture, which assures us that instead of Christianity working real spiritual transformation of the world at large, the "mystery of iniquity" was already "working" in the apostle's days in it, and that it would work on until the general apostasy and the revelation of the man of sin (2 Thessalonians 2). Secondly, it is contrary to the tenor of these parables themselves, which have already shown us how non-universal would be the reception of the truth, with three out

of four casts of seed failing to bring forth fruit. Lastly, the language from which this is argued—"the kingdom of heaven is like unto it"—does not simply mean that it is itself like "leaven," but rather like "leaven leavening three measures of meal." The *whole parable* is the likeness of the kingdom in a certain state. Compare this with the language of the second parable: "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man, which sowed good seed" (v. 24). Is it not plain that the kingdom is no more compared to the "leaven" in verse 33 than to the "man" in verse 24? In each case the whole parable is the likeness. The kingdom, therefore, need not be bad because the leaven is, nor the leaven good because the kingdom is. Into a picture of the kingdom in its present form evil may—and even must—enter, for otherwise there would be no need of judgment to set it right.

There is indeed consistency in the view of the kingdom which these parables present, and a uniform progression of evil and not of good. First, the ill success of the good seed in the first parable, and then the introduction and growth of *bad* seed in the second. Then the whole form and fashion of the kingdom changes into the form and fashion of one of the kingdoms of the world, which is the Babylonish captivity of the Church. Lastly, the very food of the children of God is tampered with, and corrupted, until complete apostasy from the faith ensues. Christ is wholly lost, and Antichrist is come.

Here, thank God, the darkness has its bound, and in the last three parables of the chapter we are to see another side of things and trace that work of God which never ceases amid all the darkness.

Chapter 6

THE DIVINE COUNSEL AND PURPOSE

The three parables which remain to be considered have found interpretations more various and conflicting than the preceding ones, and therefore require a proportionately more careful examination. The former parables were all spoken in the presence of the whole multitude, and they refer to a condition of things which the world at large is today witnessing. But with these four parables having been delivered, we read “Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and His disciples came unto Him” (Matthew 13:36). To His disciples alone He speaks the parables which follow, for they do not contain merely external history, but the sure fulfillment of the divine mind amid all the outward confusion and ruin which the former parables have shown Him not to be ignorant of.

The very number of the parables tells of this. For as there are seven in all—the number which from creation onward is the type and symbol of completeness—so this number seven is divided further into four and three. Four is the number of universality, of the world at large, from the four points of the compass—east, west, north and south. Three is the divine number, that of the Persons in the Godhead. Here, then, the first four

parables give us the world-aspect of the kingdom of heaven, and the last three give us the divine mind accomplishing with regard to it.

PARABLES OF THE TREASURE AND THE PEARL

The first two parables we shall look at together, as they invite comparison by their evident resemblance to one another.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field” (Matthew 13:44).

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (Matthew 13:45,46).

The parables are alike in that they both present to us the action of a man who purchases, at the cost of all he has, what has value in his eyes. The question is, who is presented here? The common voice replies that it is man as the seeker of salvation or of Christ—that we have here the story of individual effort after the “one thing needful,” flinging aside all other things in order to obtain it. But is this consistent with the constant representations of Scripture, or with the facts themselves? Do we thus buy Christ at the cost of all we have? It is true that we have in the prophet the exhortation to “buy” where the “wine and milk” are no doubt the figure of spiritual sustenance (Isaiah 55:1). But there, the “buying” is distinctly said to be “*without* money and *without* price.” Man is never represented as seeking salvation with wealth in his hand to purchase it. The prodigal seeks, but not until perishing with hunger. He comes back beggared, driven by necessity, and only so. All who have ever really come

back to the Father know this to be the truthful representation of the matter.

On the other hand, the real Seeker, Finder, and Buyer—everywhere in Scripture—is the Lord Jesus Christ. The figure in both parables is most evidently His. The same Person is represented in each, and also the same work, though under different aspects.

In the first parable, it is treasure hidden in a field that is the object of the Buyer. “The field,” we are told in the interpretation of the parable of the tares, “is the world.” It is an object in the *world*, then—an earthly object—that is sought for and obtained. So in this parable He is represented as buying “that field”—buying the world. He buys the field to get the treasure in it. As certainly as no man ever bought the world to get Christ, so the believer is not the “man” represented in the parable.

Did Christ, then, buy the world by His sufferings? Turn to the last chapter of this gospel, and hear Him say, when risen from the dead, “All power is given unto Me in heaven and earth.” Strictly, it is “authority,” not “power.” As the risen One He has title over all. “Ask of Me,” is the language of Jehovah to the Son begotten upon earth, “and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession” (Psalm 2:8). Thus He takes the throne in the day of His appearing and His kingdom. It is because of that wondrous descent of One “in the form of God” down to the fathomless depths of “the death of the cross,” that “*wherefore* God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name which is above every name: that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians

2:9-11). Thus Peter can speak of those who, “denying the Lord that *bought* them and bring upon themselves swift destruction” (2 Peter 2:1). These are not at all *redeemed* ones, but they *are* “bought,” for all men and all the world belong to Him as the fruit of His sufferings on that cross where He, for the sake of that which had beauty in His eyes, sold all that He had.

Thus I conceive it unquestionable that it is Christ Himself who is the central figure in these two parables. We may now compare the two sides of His work presented in them. In that of the treasure, we have seen it is the field of the “world” that is bought for the sake of the treasure in it, while in that of the pearl simply the pearl itself is purchased. Are these two figures, then—the treasure and the pearl—different aspects of the same thing, or different things? Are they the same object from different points of view, or different objects?

If we look for a moment at what has been already pointed out as to “the kingdom of heaven” of which these parables are both similitudes, we shall see that there are two spheres which it embraces, answering to those words of the Lord we have just quoted, “All authority is given unto Me in *heaven* and in *earth*.” Christ is now, as a matter of fact, gathering out from the earth those who are to “sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven”—not in earthly, but in heavenly blessing. But before “the *appearing* and kingdom,” this purpose having been accomplished, and the heavenly saints caught up to meet the Lord—He will gather to Himself a remnant of Israel and an election of the Gentiles for blessing upon the earth. Take the two purposes of Christ’s death as expressed in John 11:51, 52, where you have as the inspired comment upon Caiaphas’ advice to the Jewish council: “And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus

should die *for that nation*; and not for that nation only,” adds the inspired writer, “but that *also* He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.” Is it not significant that we find in the second of these parables the one pearl—the very type of *unity*—as that which the merchant man bought? Is it not, then, permissible and natural to turn to the other with the anticipation of finding in it “that nation” of Israel, for which also Jesus died, under the figure of the “treasure hid in the field”?

Thus would Israel on the one hand and the Church on the other be the representatives of earthly and of heavenly blessing. The Gentile nations come in to share with Israel the one, just as the departed saints of the past dispensations come in to share with the Church the other. The reason why these two alone should be spoken of, and not the saints of former times, or the Gentiles of the future, will be plain to those who consider the Scripture mode of putting these same things. To Israel belong the “promises,” as Romans 9:4 declares. The Gentiles no more come into view there than they do in the parable of the treasure here. Yet many a Scripture promises the blessing of the Gentiles on a future day. But they come in under the skirts of the now despised Jew (Zechariah 8:23). Then again, as to the Church, it is the only company of people gathered openly and avowedly for heavenly blessing. Moreover, it is the company that is being gathered *now*, and began to be with the sowing of the gospel seed in the first parable of those before us.

THE TREASURE IN THE FIELD IS ISRAEL

Let us now look somewhat closer into the details of the parable of the treasure hid in a field. Of old it had been said, “The Lord hath chosen Jacob unto Himself, and Israel for His pecu-

liar *treasure*" (Psalm 135:4). But at the time when He who had so chosen them came unto His own, there was little appearance in the condition of the people of the place they had in Jehovah's heart. "Lo-Ammi"—"not My people," had long been said of them. They were even then scattered among the Gentiles. The figure of the treasure hid in the field was the true similitude of their condition, watched over as "beloved for the father's sake," and yet trodden down by the foot of the oppressor, known to none but Him who yet longed over them as having preciousness for God.

But there was One who recognized the value of this treasure, One who had in His birth fulfilled to Israel Isaiah's prophecy of Emmanuel: "God with us." One to whom, so born, Gentiles had brought their homage as "King of the Jews." He found this treasure, presenting Himself among them as One having divine power to meet their condition and bring them forth out of their hiding place, and make manifest the object of divine favor and delight. His disciples, those who best knew His thoughts, were ever expecting the time when He would bring forth this treasure and display it openly. That question which they had proposed to Him after His resurrection shows what had long been in their hearts: "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

Yet they did not understand when they saw the gleam of brightness, which had shone out for them when He rode in the meekest of triumphs amidst the acclamations of the multitude into Jerusalem, fade and die out in the midday darkness which so shortly after fell on Calvary. They did not yet understand how He was in all this but the "man" in His own parable who, finding treasure in the field, *hideth it*, and for joy thereof goeth forth and selleth all that He hath, and buyeth that field.

The treasure is still hidden. Calvary is come and gone; Joseph's new tomb is emptied of its Guest; they have stood upon the mount called Olivet and seen Him whom they have owned King of the Jews go up to take another throne than that of David. Then they are found charging the people with their denial of the Holy One and the Just, bidding them still to repent and be converted, and even now, He who had left them would be sent back to them, and the times of refreshing would come from the presence of the Lord. Scenes before the council follow, one at last in which a man, whose face shines with the glory of heaven, stands and charges the leaders of the nation with the accumulated guilt of ages: "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye" (Acts 7:51). And they cast him out of the city and stoned him. Those that were bidden have been called to the marriage, and they will not come.

Then the city is destroyed, and the people scattered. Israel is still a hidden treasure. The parable gives no bringing forth; it simply says the field is bought. It is now but "Ask, and I will give Thee." All waits upon the will of Him to whom everything now belongs. But *He* waits, and has waited for nearly twenty centuries, as if the treasure were nothing to Him now and He had forgotten His purpose.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE IS THE CHURCH

Then the second parable comes in as what is needed by way of explanation for the long delay. The "one pearl of great price" speaks of the preciousness to Him of another object upon which He has set His heart. "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it"—"went and sold all that He had and bought *it*." The field of the world is not now in view, for the Church is heavenly.

Israel still has the earthly “promises.” *We* are blessed with all spiritual blessings in *heavenly* places in Christ Jesus.

This Church is one—one pearl. It is brought up out of the depths of the sea, and taken out of the rough shell in which it is first incased. Taken out at the cost of the life that to which it owes its being, the pearl is a fitting type of that which has been drawn out of the sea of Gentile waters and out of the roughness of its natural condition at the cost of the life of Him by whom it was seen and chosen before the foundation of the world. That death of His witnesses of the “great price” it is worth to Him. It is sweet to see that His heart can give His people the title which the Christian heart so commonly and naturally takes to be His alone; we, dear fellow believers, are His precious pearl. Nor is there any “hiding again” here, or suspension of this purpose. This is the second meaning of the cross, “who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

Chapter 7

THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL

In the last of the final three parables we find, I believe, not another aspect of the divine dealings with the mingled crop in the field of christendom, but a *new* acting, whether in grace or judgment, after the merchant man has possessed himself of his pearl—after the saints of the past and present time are caught up to Christ.

PARABLE OF THE NET CAST INTO THE SEA

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world [or age]: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:47-51).

The parable closes thus, just as the parable of the tares of the field, with the judgment executed at the appearing of the Lord. The common application of it is to the going forth of the gospel during the present time, and the final separation of bad and good when the Lord comes. That is, the meaning is considered to be almost identical with the parable of the tares. However, I

believe there are some plain reasons against such an interpretation.

In the first place, the parallelism of the two parables leaves little in the picture of the net cast into the sea that is not simply repetition of what had already been given. This, at first sight, would not seem natural or likely. But beside this, it is to be considered that Scripture plainly gives us another going forth of the gospel of the kingdom, and as the result of it a discriminative judgment when the Son of Man comes—apart altogether from the present going forth of the gospel and the judgment of the tares of christendom. The company of sheep and goats in Matthew 25 is an instance of this. There will be no such separation of the true and false among Christian professors as is there depicted between these sheep and goats, “when the Son of Man shall” have “come in His glory.” On the contrary, the true among Christian professors will come with Him to judgment on that day, as we have seen both Colossians 3:4 and Jude bear witness. The judgment of christendom will then not be discriminative at all: the wheat having been already removed from the field, tares alone will remain in it. Thus in Matthew 25, neither tares nor wheat can be at all in question.

After the saints of the present time have been caught up to the Lord, and christendom has become a tarefield simply, a new work of the Lord will begin in Israel and among the surrounding nations to gather out a people for *earthly* blessing. It is when God’s judgments are upon the earth that the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. This will be a time of “great tribulation” such as Matthew 24 depicts. Antichrist is there, and the “abomination of desolation” stands in the holy place. Yet amid all the evil and sorrow of the time, the “everlasting gospel” goes forth with its call, so opposite to the proclamation of

this day of grace *now* being made. “Fear God, and give glory to Him; *for the hour of His judgment is come*” (Revelation 14:7).

Plainly, one could not say that yet. We say it is “the accepted time, the day of salvation”—not of judgment. Only after the present day is closed could the everlasting gospel be preached in that way—the old “gospel of the kingdom” indeed, but with the new addition to it of the hour of God’s judgment being come.

It is this proclamation of the everlasting gospel that is the key to that company of sheep and goats standing before the throne of the Son of Man when He is come.

EVERLASTING GOSPEL GOING OUT TO THE GENTILES

Now, if we look a little closely, this parable brings before us just such a state of things as that amid which the everlasting gospel goes forth. A “net cast into the sea” is the picture of the gospel going forth in the midst of unquiet and commotion, the lawless will of man at work everywhere, the wicked “like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt” (Isaiah 57:20).

Moreover, if we turn to the very earliest of Scripture types—to Genesis 1—we shall find an exceedingly striking confirmation of this view. In those creative days we find, day by day, the successive steps by which God brought out of ruin the beauty of a scene where at length He could rest, because all was “very good.” It is not difficult to find this to be the picture and type of how He, step by step, after the misery and ruin of Adam’s fall, is proceeding toward the final production of a scene in which once again, and never more to be disturbed, He can rest. The third day speaks of the separation of Israel from among the Gentiles. The waters of the salt and barren sea are representative of man

left to the lusts and passions of his own heart, or in other words, the Gentiles (see Revelation 17:15). Israel is the “earth,” taken up and cultivated by God to get, if it might be, fruit. The third day speaks of this separation of Israel from the Gentiles, as the first parable of the three we are now looking at speaks of her as God’s earthly treasure.

This is all a scene on earth. The next creative day gives us, however, the furnishing of the heavens as we have already seen in the second parable of the “pearl.” If the sun is a type of Christ as that which brings in and rules the day, then the moon is no less a type of the church, the reflection—however feeble and unstable—of Christ to the world in the night of His absence. The present time, then, is figured here: the time of the revelation, in testimony, of both Christ and the Church.

If we pass on to the sixth day, we have just as plainly in figure the kingdom of Christ having come. The rule of the man and woman over the earth: not rule over the day or night, not the light of testimony, but rule over the earth *itself* is a picture of what we call millennial blessing. Finally in this series comes the Sabbath, God’s own rest. He sanctifies the whole day, and blesses it. No other day succeeds it.

Now, what intervenes between the fourth and the sixth days—between the church and the millennial dispensations? A period, short indeed in duration, but important enough to occupy thirteen out of the twenty-two chapters of the book of Revelation. This is the very time to which, as I believe, the parable of the net refers. What, then, is its type in the fifth day? Once again the “sea,” but the waters now supernaturally productive, teeming with life through the decree of the Almighty. So it will be in the day of Revelation 7 as the hundred and forty-four thousand of the tribes of Israel, and the innumerable multitude

of Gentiles who have come out of “*the* great tribulation,” bear abundant witness. These are the gathering out of the people for earthly blessing, as the fruit of the everlasting gospel.

These passages, then, mutually confirm each other as applying to a time characterized by Gentile lawlessness, with Israel fully partaking of this character, and not yet owned of God though He be working in her midst. Into this “sea” the net is cast, and, gathering of every kind, is drawn to shore when it is full.

It is not until *after* this that the sorting begins: “which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, and cast the bad away.” This shows us that the sorting cannot apply to anything which goes on during the time of the preaching of the gospel, for the net is no longer in the waters when it takes place. It is thus evidently the same thing as that which the interpretation speaks of: “So shall it be at the end of the age: the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from the just.” This is the clearance of the earth for millennial blessing. When the saints are removed at the coming of the Lord for His own which 1 Thessalonians 4 sets before us, the wicked will not be severed from the just, but the just from the wicked. The righteous will be taken, and the wicked left. Here it is the reverse of this—the wicked taken and the righteous left. Thus, with the divine accuracy of the inspired Word, which invites scrutiny and rewards attention to its minutest details, it is said in the judgment of the tarefield of christendom, “They shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity,” but not, “they shall sever the wicked from *among the just*,” for the just have been before removed. Here, on the contrary, the righteous are not those taken away to inherit heavenly blessing, but left behind to inherit earthly. Parallel passages will

be found in Matthew 24:37-42 and Luke 17:24,37. In the Old Testament, the Psalms are especially full of this severing of the wicked from among the just (see Psalms 1:4,5; 37:9-11; Malachi 4:1-3).

With this glance at things which belong to that short but most momentous season—the season of the earth’s travail before her final great deliverance, the seven-fold sketch of the kingdom of the *absent* King necessarily ends. The blessing of earth, as of Israel, necessitates His *presence*, which will be the close of the “kingdom and *patience*,” and the beginning of that “kingdom and glory” which will never end. It will be well for us if we keep in mind the sure connection between the “patience” and the “glory.”

—F. W. G.

