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The Second Coming of Christ.

When Jesus ascended from Mount Olivet visibly in the presence of his disciples, and as they looked steadfastly toward heaven a cloud received him out of their sight, "two men stood by them in white apparel who also said, 'Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.'

That the two men in white apparel were celestial messengers commissioned of God to make this important announcement, is generally conceded. That Jesus will come to earth again, and that all the tribes of the earth "shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory," was definitely announced by Jesus himself.

The Apostle Paul is specific on this subject. To the Thessalonians he speaks of "the Lord Jesus who shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels." "Ye turned," he says in another place, "to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus." To Titus he says, "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ."

James says, "Behold, the Judge standeth at the door."

Paul and Peter agree that "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

The venerable John opens his Apocalyptic visions with this remarkable declaration: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever: Amen. Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him." And he closes the record with this significant paragraph: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly: Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

That Jesus will come to earth again is the subject alike of prophecy and promise.

The New Testament is full of this idea in positive expressions which can not be misunderstood. It was the center of the apostles' hope, and a prime factor in their teaching.

All biblical scholars of note, from Luther to the present time, have agreed that the second coming of the Christ would be in the close of the second millennium after his ascension. The prophecies point to this period; and their rapid fulfillment in our day seems to justify the expectation of many that the time is near at hand.

Jesus said in the parable of the fig tree: "When its branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh; so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these

things, know that it is near, even at the door."

Again: "When these things begin to come to pass look up, and lift up your head; for your redemption draweth nigh."

If an apostle, in his day, could say: "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand."

And again: "Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ," surely we may, with greater confidence, anticipate his coming in our day.

We then who are looking and longing for his coming should be prepared for his appearing.

It will be a joyful day to all those "who love his appearing," for he will bring with him crowns of righteousness which he will give to them; for the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

It is time we had our lamps ready and oil in our vessels; for the shout may ring out at any time: "Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him."

Then will transpire a more sublime scene than was witnessed even at Mt. Sinai; for Peter, replying to the inquiry of the scoffer, saying, "Where is the promise of his coming?" says, "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

The exhortation of the Apostle also is appropriate now and to us: "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." 2 Peter iii. 11-14.

Letter of Bro. I. M. Johns.

We insert this communication, not because it brings to light any new truth, or sets forth any teaching not fully discussed in our pages years ago; but because we perceive that Bro. Johns has fallen into the hands of Judaizing teachers, and because it gives us an opportunity of saying again what we have shown at length in former volumes: That Judaizing teaching is, in our day, working no less mischief than it was in the days of the Apostle Paul. Hear what he says about that Law "written and engraven in stones." "And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance, which glory was to be done away; how shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason

of the glory that excellet. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: and not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished." 2 Cor. 4-13.

Paul is the minister not of the letter (or law), but of the spirit (or gospel). The former killeth, the latter giveth life. The "ministration of death written and engraven in stones" fixes beyond controversy what law was meant. We know that there fell at the time it was given three thousand men in Israel. He speaks of it "as that which is done away," contrasted with the gospel which remaineth.

The children of Israel, he says, "could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished." "O" says one of these Judaizers, "that means the ceremonial law." We reply, that the ceremonial law was never graven on stones so far as the record shows; and no man has any warrant in Scripture or common sense in making such a distinction. This whole Sabbath question is a terrible effort, not to put a new patch on an old garment, but to stick on the old patch of the Law on the new garment of the Gospel.

If the lesson taught on the mount of transfiguration means any thing it shows, Moses, the law-giver, and Elias, the prophet, laying down their authority at the feet of Jesus. This solemn and significant act was performed in a convention of two worlds; the seen represented by Peter, James and John, the unseen, by Moses and Elias. As they talked with him about his death, that is, the fulfilling of the prophecies and the taking away the law, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." And as they thus surrendered their authority in view of the immediate consummation of all they had done and said, God said to that representative assembly, "This is my Son, hear him." Thus Jesus was formally invested with all authority in heaven and on earth; for the representatives of both worlds were commanded to hear him.

Now let these teachers who want to get back under the law show where Jesus ever commanded any man to keep the Jewish Sabbath and we will "hear Him," but we can no longer recognize Moses as authority.

To hear or read after these teachers one would conclude they were the only people in the land who have any respect for the word of God, or who observe a day of rest; when the fact is, we as a people insist as earnestly on a day of sacred rest—a Sabbath to the Lord—as they do, only with this difference, that we honor God by hearing his son Jesus, while they dishonor Christ by following the servant Moses. The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death.

Yet we are not without law; for Jesus appointed legislators who by precept and example taught us to come together on the first day of the week, not by a commandment the breach of which involves death, but by the law of love under which every Christian should observe the Christian Sabbath with as much more strictness and devotion than a Jew did his Sabbath as Christ is above Moses or Christianity is better than Judaism. But if they take the Jewish Sabbath they must take the Jewish law for its observance. The severity of this law is seen in the case which Moses referred directly to God lest he should go too far in stoning a man to death for gathering a bundle of sticks on the Sabbath, to bake his manna. God ordered the law to be executed and the man died. How many of these sticklers for the Jewish

Sabbath would, under that law, escape death?

If the Son make us free, we shall be free indeed. Such freedom we have through our Lord Jesus Christ—freedom from the law of sin and death.

Return to Primitive Christianity.

DISCUSSION OF LEADING PRINCIPLES.

(Selected.)

EVIDENCES OF THE GOSPEL.

REVELATION POSSIBLE AND PROBABLE.

It appears to me that there is more of art than of philosophy, more of method than of necessity in any one attempting to argue gravely and formally either the absolute necessity or the obvious possibility of revelation. The true and unadorned history of every ancient and of every modern pagan tribe, nation or people—the follies, the vanities, and crimes—the pusillanimity, the mental imbecility of man without the knowledge of God, are all the demonstration and proof requisite to the establishment of the necessity of some certain superhuman and supernatural communication on man's relations to the universe. The simple reading of the first chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans, regarding it in no other light than a fair and impartial view of the nations without the Bible, is enough for those who have the powers of perception, sound, healthy, on the subject of the necessity of an authoritative communication from heaven.

One argument on the simple possibility of such a message from our Creator, has to me always appeared enough. It is a very old-fashioned one, and consists of no more than a single clause affixed to one of King David's demonstrations that God could see, and hear, and know man. The divine logician reasons thus: "He that planteth the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know?" To which I only add, He that taught man speech, can he not speak to him? Revelation is therefore possible.

Is it probable? Preparatory to one argument on this subject, I shall lay before our readers, the concessions of some of the brightest names on the lists of the Sceptics of the French and English schools.

Blount says, "It is not safe to trust Deism alone without Christianity joined to it." Shaftsbury says, "Christianity ought to be more highly prized." Rousseau says, "Philosophy can do nothing good, which religion does not do still better; and religion does many good things which philosophy cannot do at all. Modern philosophers are indebted to Christianity for their best ideas. The solid authority of modern governments, and the less frequent revelation, are incontestably due to Christianity. It has rendered governments themselves less sanguinary; this is proved by facts, on comparing them with ancient governments. Religion better understood, excluding fanaticism, has given more mildness to Christian manners. This change is not the work of letters; for wherever they have flourished, humanity has not been more respected on their account; of which the cruelties of the Athenians, of the Egyptians, of the Roman Emperors, and of the Chinese, are so many proofs." Byron says, "Indisputably, the firm believers in the gospel have a great advantage over all others—for this simple reason, that if true, they will have their reward hereafter; and if there be no hereafter, they can but with the infidel in his eternal sleep, having had the assistance of an exalted hope through life, without subsequent disappointment, since (at the worst for them) out of nothing, nothing can arise, not even sorrow."

After the presentation of such testimony as the foregoing, it is unnecessary to say another word in proof of the point, that revelation is necessary. Indeed when the subject is

fairly considered; when the condition of the heathen in all ages is taken into view; when we consider what the most enlightened heathen nations have been and still are; what even the heathen sages and philosophers have been; in short, when we look at the world in every age, and behold its spiritual darkness, and its deplorable moral condition, we can only wonder why more revelation has not been given than has been. Six hundred millions of our race are still in darkness of heathenism, still bowing down to stocks and stones, still practicing their bloody and abominable rites, and revelation unnecessary! We cannot believe that any man in his sober senses can, on due consideration, believe this. We will not therefore insist upon it further.

Revelation then is necessary, and, as a consequence, it would not be a gratuitous and unnecessary act in the Deity to reveal himself to mankind. Nay, the probability is altogether in favor of the idea that he would do this; for a benevolent being, such as we have reason to suppose the Deity to be, would naturally do that for his creatures, which their cases might need, so far as his wisdom would permit. And thus we come to the conclusion, a priori, that he has actually made such a revelation.

But if a revelation has been made, which of the avowed revelations is the genuine one? There have been various religious systems in different ages of the world, that have claimed a divine origin; which circumstance is of itself an argument in favor of the idea that a revelation has been made, just as counterfeit money is evidence of the true. Which, then, of the various religious systems that have at different periods been presented to mankind, is entitled to acceptance by divine revelation.

And in the outset it may be safely remarked, that none of the religious systems of the heathen, ancient or modern, can for a moment compare with Christianity in this respect, either on account of extrinsic excellence, or weight of evidence. Surely, the gross idolatry, the bloody rites, and the filthy abominations even of the most enlightened heathen—of Greece and Rome, of China and Hindostan—are not worthy to be named in the same day with the doctrines and precepts of Christianity. And if we consider the earth-born sensuality and the groveling theology of Mahometanism, we shall find it little better in many respects than heathenism itself. Besides, Mahometanism were a revelation, this very circumstance would establish the claims of Christianity to a divine original, inasmuch as it acknowledges the Messiahship of Christ. If it were worth the while, a comparison could be easily instituted between the two religions, most marvelously to the advantage of that of Christ.

"Mohammed established his religion," says Pascal, "by killing others; Jesus Christ, by making his followers lay down their own lives; Mohammed, by forbidding his law to be read; Jesus Christ, by commanding us to read. In a word, the two were so opposite, that if Mohammed took the way, in all human probability, to succeed, Jesus Christ took the way, humanly speaking, to be disappointed. And hence, instead of concluding that because Mohammed succeeded, Jesus might in like manner have succeeded, we ought to infer, that since Mohammed has succeeded, Christianity must have inevitably perished, if it has not been supported by a power altogether divine."

"Go," says Bishop Sherlock, "to your natural religion; lay before her Mahomet and his disciples, arrayed in armor and blood, riding in triumph over the spoils of thousands who fell by his victorious sword. Show her the cities which he set in flames, the countries which he ravaged and destroyed, and the miserable distress of all the inhabitants of the earth. When he has viewed him in this