

The Return of the Lord

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This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:11).

The Lord Jesus Christ will return to this world. The Biblical message centers in Christ Jesus, the Son of God. Salvation is always presented as the work of God. When we speak of "The Return of The Lord" we mean the return of Jesus Christ. We are thinking of Jesus of Nazareth who lived about thirty-three years on the face of this earth more than two thousand years ago. We know that He died a cruel death on Calvary as the Lamb of God. But His disciples announced that He rose from the dead on the third day. They reported that after He rose from the dead He was seen of them forty days, showing Himself alive by many infallible proofs. The record is that they witnessed His ascension into heaven. They received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost from Him as He had promised. And they waited for His return from heaven.

To have any confidence in Christ's return, there must be faith. This can be understood only in the context of the Bible. It can be believed only on the basis of faith in the God of the Bible. In other words, as we open the Bible, as we read it, study it, meditate upon it, it becomes clear to us who God is. God is sovereign; He is the Savior of men. He will save through His Son those who come to Him. God in Himself is holy; He is of purer eyes than to behold evil. He is righteous and just. He is the Judge of all the earth. He looks down upon man and sees man in his sinfulness and sin. Man is not acceptable as he is. But God has a plan of salvation. He will save man, and He will save man through His Son, Jesus Christ, who is now at the right hand of God the Father, interceding on behalf of those who put their trust in Him. And He is coming again in the will of God. You need to keep all of this in mind when you are thinking of the return of the Lord.

That this teaching may be known only within the family of believers is a fact that needs to be understood. There is no possible way of learning this outside God's revelation.

There is no doubt that the Scriptures say that the Lord will return. I want to bring to mind several parables that point to Christ's return. First of all I will remind you of the parable of the ten virgins. They were supposed to be up and waiting for the coming of the bridegroom. They were to have lamps to light the way when he came. Now, five wise virgins kept oil in their lamps because he might come that night. Five foolish virgins did not keep oil in their lamps. They did not expect him that night. He came, as he said he would, and the five virgins with oil in their lamps went in with him to the feast. The five foolish virgins who did not have oil went away to get it and were left outside. You may read that in Matthew 25:1-13. The story tells quite plainly that they were kept out because they were not ready for his coming. They did not expect it. In a very real sense they did not believe he was coming, and they missed it.

In Matthew 24, beginning at verse 42; is another parable. This also is as clear as day.

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the good-man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh (Matthew 24:42-44).

You do not know when, but one thing is sure, He is going to come.

Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of (Matthew 24:45-50).

The world around us cannot guide us as to our Lord's return.

The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 24:50-51).

In some respects that is one of the hardest things that is said in the New Testament. The Lord Himself said, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." We must look to the Word and trust, being careful not to try to set a date of His return. And certainly not indicate that He is not coming back.

Look again in Matthew 25:14-30. We commonly call this "The Parable of the Talents." One person was given five talents, another was given two, and another was given one. They were told to occupy while their master was gone. After a long time he returned, and he judged these three servants. One thing we often overlook is that the parable of the talents refers to the fact that the Lord of those servants was coming back. The parable tells that he came back and he judged them for the way they had done while he was gone. Judgment is sure.

And that is not the only place in the Bible where judgment is mentioned. In II Timothy we read:

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom (II Timothy 4:1).

There you have it. Many of our confessions of faith make it very plain that the Lord Jesus will return to judge. I do not know why it is that a great many people, in reading that, lay emphasis upon the judgment and want to skip over the fact that He will return. He is coming back and when He comes back He will judge.

In Matthew 25:31-46 you will find there will be a separation of the people on the basis of the judgment that Christ will make. That is the parable of the sheep and the goats. So very few people talk about it, and I know why. You can hardly mention it without people beginning to wonder, "Am I a sheep or a goat?" It is not for me to judge. But I will tell you one thing: judgment will take place. It will take place when He comes.

In I Thessalonians 5:2 there is something very simple and plain about the return of the Lord, "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." I have often asked myself, "What's that like?" Have you ever had your house broken into? Do you know how a thief in the night comes? When you least expect him.

Five things have been brought out by these parables. First, about the ten virgins, He is coming. Then about the evil servant, the time is unknown but His coming is sure. There will be a judgment. The judgment is sure, absolute. And there will be a separation on the basis of that judgment.

There is no escaping these facts; The Bible declares it. The Bible is the Word of God. And God does not lie.

II Thessalonians 1:1-12

You may believe the Bible as the Word of God and believe in God. You may be already committed to Christ and you are living right now in the grace of God and should be known as a Christian. Or you may only have heard of these things about the return of the Lord and are interested in them. There may be some

who will read this to whom all that we are saying is new. You could have these gracious benefits, but if you are outside of the Lord Jesus Christ the answer would be no.

Now let me draw your attention again to Acts 1:11. "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." For many persons this statement actually has no meaning. In the first place, it is found in the Bible. You will not find it anywhere else. If anyone does not accept the Bible, this statement will not be important. Second, it was spoken by an angel. For anyone who does not accept the reality of angels of course this word does not mean anything. Third, it refers to heaven, "taken up from you into heaven." There may be some who do not accept the idea of heaven. Then the sentence does not mean anything. Fourth, consider the words "taken up from you." For anyone who says that the ascension from this world into heaven is impossible, then the sentence is not believed. Fifth, for anyone who does not think of Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God then this statement is judged fantastic. It is not true. Sixth, this was spoken about the Jesus who was raised from the dead. Well now, someone may just not believe in the resurrection. In that case you would not believe this sentence. Seventh, our passage of Scripture says Jesus "shall so come." If you do not accept the idea of the bodily return of the Lord Jesus Christ, then this statement does not mean anything.

I have shown you, by going over it piecemeal, at least seven spots where unbelief could reject this statement. This may be one reason why it is not said more often.

I am concerned about the unbeliever. I have given my life over to preaching to the unbeliever. I would do anything in the world to help the unbeliever. But what I am talking about will not help the unbeliever, if he will not accept these things I am saying. And so these words and this whole study about the return of the Lord is directed primarily toward believers. We are not now trying to persuade others to believe as much as we are trying to understand what Paul meant when he wrote about this tremendous event.

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ (II Thessalonians 1:1-12).

First look at verse 7, "And to you who are troubled." That means troubled in the way in which he wrote in verses 3,4,5, and 6 – troubled as the persecution, distresses and tribulations were brought upon them. "Rest" is comfort and peace. "With us" – that is Paul himself. "When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels." This parallels "this same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go."

"Taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (verses 8-9). Hard? Yes, but it is recorded in the Scripture.

"When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day" (vs. 10). Years ago I began to feel a responsibility that I should preach the whole council of God, which includes His return. The return of the Lord is involved in the spiritual blessing which comes upon believers who grow in the Lord.

Now let us look back at verse 3: "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of everyone of you all toward each other aboundeth." "Your faith groweth exceedingly." How would a person's faith grow? It grows in what you understand to be promised of God. He promised that your guilt would be forgiven. He promised among other things that He would be with you and would guide you wherever you would go. He would comfort you. He would strengthen you. You get to know more and more of what God promises. The more you understand, the better you believe it; and the better you believe it, the stronger you are.

"And the charity of everyone of you all toward each other aboundeth." Your love toward one another increases. You will notice here faith and charity: faith toward God, charity toward man. Trusting in God, and caring for your fellow man is the consequence of expecting to meet God face to face.

This was the evidence of the reality of their spiritual growth as a consequence of what you read in verse 4, "So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure." Paul loved to talk about these Thessalonians. He gloried in them in the churches of God.

Paul goes on to say in verses 4 and 5 that their patience and faith which caused their faith to grow exceedingly and their charity to abound was a manifest token, an evidence, of the righteous judgment of God, the good judgment of God, the wisdom of God. God counted them worthy of His kingdom, for which they also suffered. Then he goes on to say, "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you."

Paul counted that their testimony was a glorious thing. It showed up in the strength of their witness in the time of trial. He talked about them everywhere. With all the suffering that they had, they were so faithful. In verse 5, he felt that their strength to endure was actually a vindication of God's way of doing things. God was going to permit them to suffer, that is true; and then He would use this to prepare them for future blessing. Also, He would make this same suffering the basis for severe punishment of such as did not respond to the Gospel. It is just as plain as day that the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels. He will take vengeance in flaming fire upon them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel.

II Thessalonians 2:1-6

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away 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; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time (II Thessalonians 2:1-6).

In the first two verses Paul is indicating apparently some of the believers were disturbed, troubled by the possibility of the soon coming of Jesus Christ. Each of the five chapters in I Thessalonians ends with some emphasis on the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the people had become obsessed by the thought that the day of Christ is at hand.

Mind you, it was not wrong for people to think about this, or to talk about the day of Christ and the possibility of His coming back at any time. But in the event that anybody was being upset, so far as his spirit was concerned, Paul has something to say to him. While the time of the Lord Jesus Christ's return is unknown, you can see now that He is not going to come "tomorrow" in terms of the time when Paul wrote this.

Now notice in verses 3 and 4. The day of Christ's return is going to come, but first there will be a falling away. That is what we commonly speak of as the apostasy. And there is a "man of sin" that will

be revealed. Notice how Paul himself put it in the beginning of verse 3, "Let no man deceive you by any means." I suspect that of all the various doctrines of Scripture none is so readily distorted, because it deals with the future. There is a lot of falling away and rebellion going on all the time. We cannot know for sure which is the final occurrence. Verses 2 and 3 indicate a very serious kind of error or blasphemy that is going to be common at the time just before the coming of the Lord. That is the spirit of anti-Christ.

Now let us include verses 5 and 6 in our present thinking. Will you just make a note that if you had been listening to the Apostle Paul preach, this is the kind of thing you would have heard. Apparently Paul had preached this whole line of truth to prepare his hearers to be able to expect the coming of the Lord intelligently.

What is the gist of this portion of Scripture? Dwelling upon this truth of the coming of the Lord can be unsettling. Nobody knows the time, yet we know that some things must occur first. There will be an apostasy. There will be the man of sin revealed. Great error will be projected into the very worship of God. But there is a restraining factor at work now. God is holding things back, and will continue to do so until He is ready.

II Thessalonians 2:7-12

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, 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 (II Thessalonians 2:7-12).

When I read this passage, I think of what Peter had to say about the writings of Paul. Some things are hard to be understood (II Peter 3:16). And I am conscious of the fact that Peter warned that those who are unlearned and unstable, twist also the other Scriptures to their own destruction. Do not start changing what the Bible says, and do not start reducing it. Check yourself when you start saying it cannot be. Be sure you know what the Bible really teaches in all its context on any subject before you try to make any passage fit your thinking. Actually, your thinking is the thing that should be adjusted to fit the Bible.

Now look at the passage beginning at verse 7. "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work." Mystery is something that is hidden. It means *hidden* in the sense of unseen. "Iniquity" refers to that which is of evil, of sin. "Doth already work" means that it is already operative. "Only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way." Here is one of the places where the King James Version uses a word that is completely out of our present conversation. There is only one place that I know of where the word *let* is used in this way and that is in the playing of tennis. There you speak of a "let" ball. If the ball hits the top of the net and is impeded, hindered in its progress, they call it a "let" ball. So here you have this word, "Now he who letteth," meaning He who hindereth. "Will let" – He will hinder until He be taken out of the way. This implies that there is active and operative in the world now a restraining force, a force that restrains evil and wickedness.

Look at that seventh verse again. The hidden element, the mystery, the underground factor of iniquity, of evil, is already working. But Someone else is working who restrains the evil. We are surrounded every day by evidence that there is a hand restraining the evil, actually holding down the trouble. But there is going to be a day coming when this restraining hand will be taken away. He who now hinders the evil will be taken away.

Verse 8 goes on, "Then shall that Wicked be revealed." This is literally "that wicked one." This may refer back to verse 3, "that man of sin." In various interpretations this will be called the anti-Christ. Paul did not use that phrase like John used it in his epistles, but possibly that is what we have here. "Whom

the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." It would seem that Paul had the same line of truth that came to John on the Isle of Patmos. But in Paul's writings he does not develop further the fact that this wicked one shall be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume. The Lord will eventually destroy him with the spirit of His mouth. "The spirit of his mouth" will remind you of that vision in the Revelation, "Out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword" (Rev. 1:16).

Verse 9 says, "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders." Now this is really serious. This anti-Christ is going to come as soon as the restraining hand has been taken away. His coming will be "after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders." The book of the Revelation tells us that this anti-Christ will come with power to do miracles that will be literally astonishing. In the Old Testament it was implied that a prophet would come who would do miracles that were literally incredible. (Deuteronomy 13:1. See also Matthew 24:24). "Lying wonders" does not mean that the wonders will lie. But they will be used to enforce the lie of the one who would be leading people away from the Lord. They were urged not to follow this person even though he did show them miracles.

"And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish." This one will act with the ability, the capacity to delude, to deceive the people who in themselves are unrighteous. The people do not have the light of God shining in their hearts, "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" (Verses 11 and 12). The hidden principle of evil is already at work. He who now is hindering and restraining the evil shall be taken away. "Then shall that Wicked be revealed," possibly anti-Christ, maybe the man of sin, probably both. In any case his fate is sure. But before he is brought to his fate he will do a great deal of harm. He will surely be doomed, but this anti-Christ will be able to perform amazing things. "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

When I say this is one of the hardest passages, I do not mean that it is so hard to understand, as I do mean it is hard to bear. It is just frightening when you realize that there are people who actually expose themselves to this danger. They can be unrighteous in their hearts, not following after God, and in that they could be easily deceived because they are in the dark. "And for this cause God shall send them a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

Here is the most obvious passage dealing with anti-Christ. There is such a person as anti-Christ. He is evil. He will come. He will seek to delude. And God will allow him to delude people who do not love the truth. Souls that do not love the truth are vulnerable to this delusion. To find pleasure in unrighteousness is to expose one's self to this peril of being deceived and finally destroyed. I tell you this is a dangerous thing.

II Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

In looking over this epistle it appears that the Christians in Thessalonica were being persecuted and harassed by other people who were not obedient to God. Paul was encouraging these Christians to remember that they could look forward to complete vindication in the course of God's program. The time would come when He would send His Son to return from heaven in glory and He would then vindicate those who had put their trust in Him.

The Apostle is again touching on something that the Lord Jesus Himself mentioned when He was teaching, as we read in each of the Gospels. With reference to the end of this age, the grain would ripen

and then there would be the harvest. The ripening of the grain is going on now. Some people look out upon the fields and they think that the grain is ripe as of now and that the harvest will come tonight. But the point that the Lord was making in His teaching was that they could know that certain things would have to happen before the harvest would come. So Paul is drawing attention to it here. He intimates to them that he had told them this before. "Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?" (2:5).

Paul has spoken of apostasy, now he encourages true believers.

But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work. Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith. But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil. And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you. And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ (II Thessalonians 2:13-3:5).

"God . . . hath chosen you." The word chosen has in it primarily the idea of called. God has called you to salvation. This word chosen is not a matter of selection in the sense of choosing one as over against two or three others He did not choose. You are chosen in a sense that you are called up to what God has for you. He calls to salvation those that look for Him that they should receive the benefits of the grace of God and the work of God in Jesus Christ.

"Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." This salvation was to take place because they would in themselves be inclined one hundred percent to walk in the ways of God. Sanctification would mean that they would be totally brought over into the will of God by His Spirit. Sanctification is what the Spirit does. When the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is in the heart, He moves the person to want to commit himself fully to God. This is, of course, involved in the experience of being saved, because as you give yourself over one hundred percent to God, God will work in you totally to will and to do of His good pleasure. He hath chosen you to salvation through being inwardly inclined to total commitment to God by the Holy Spirit and belief of the truth. We not only believe that the truth is, but we believe it in the sense that we take it to ourselves. We apply this truth to ourselves.

Now we come to verse 15: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle." In view of the fact that God has called you to salvation and that you do belong to Him, Paul exhorts you to stand fast. Take your definite stand at this point and do not give way. "Hold the traditions," that is to say, hold on to the truth that we have taught. Today, when we speak of a tradition, we commonly infer that something was true fifty years ago but is not necessarily true now. Paul does not mean that kind of tradition. He has in mind the kind of tradition when the things are taught from one to another, just passed on from one to another. These truths were taught person to person, whether by word or by letter. When he says "by word, or our epistle," he means by our teaching or by our writing.

In verses 16 and 17 we have prayer, almost like a benediction, that Paul commits to these people. He is talking about people who really have committed themselves to the Lord. They want His blessing. Their comfort comes from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and from His gracious Father.

A Christian does not live in his own strength. He is guided. He is blessed. He is carried along. The Lord Himself is working in him. And so, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father comforts your heart and stablishes you in every good word and work. We read in chapter 3:1-5, that the people were to "pray for us" so that when we get up to preach and to teach we will have an open way of presenting the

Word. "And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith." Here Paul is just admitting that in his ministry he runs into opposition. He is praying that the way will be open for the message to be delivered so that he can get it out among the people.

Then in verses 3 and 4, we have Paul's further comment of his confidence in the Lord with reference to these believers. Although the believer will want to stay "away from evil, Paul does not depend on the believer. He depends on the Lord. "We have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you." Although we just naturally think that being a Christian means we are going to stand up and do the right thing, being a Christian does not change a human that much. Being a Christian just gets you in touch with the Lord. It is the Lord that makes the difference. It is Christ in you that is the hope of glory. The believer has Christ in him, that is the way it is done.

Now verse 5 carries on the same general theme. Here again, any number of us would be inclined to preach to each other and to tell each other, "You ought to love the Lord: you ought to love God. It is your responsibility. And you ought to wait for Christ. You ought to be looking for Him." Very often we are inclined to criticize each other about this thing and try to bring ourselves into line. But notice, Paul is praying that God would lead them into it.

I want to remind you again that love does not have much to do with your sentiment or with your feelings. It involves the way you act and the way in which in your heart you respond and think. So, actually, directing your hearts into the love of God will be the response of that soul to God.

"And unto the patient waiting for Christ." Here again you could easily tell one another we ought to be looking for Him. But the truth of the matter is that it will be the faithfulness of the Holy Spirit in you who causes you to look for Him.

II Thessalonians 3:6-18

John in his first epistle points out concerning those who expect to meet the Lord face to face, "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (I John 3:3). Belief in the return of the Lord is a very significant and dynamic doctrine so far as the individual is concerned. I would just humbly give my witness and testimony that invariably when you find a man or a woman whose thinking about the Lord Jesus Christ includes His coming again, there is a very real strength in that testimony.

At the same time the return of the Lord is easily misunderstood and a fertile field for error. The Bible tells us with reference to the return of the Lord that no man knoweth the day nor the hour, not even the Son, when the Lord Jesus Christ will return to this world. "In such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:44). Any number of times we come across people who say, "I would never set a date, but don't you think we are right now in the last days?" Well, you see, that already is an identification of the seasons, and it is not for us to know the times nor the seasons (I Thessalonians 5:1).

There are two common errors with reference to time that seem to prevail among people generally with distinct results. One of these is, "It will not be this time. Maybe never for that matter, but it will not be now." Now those are the ones about whom the Lord Jesus told parables. One of these was the evil servant who figured that his lord was not coming back any time soon. He neglected his duty and took advantage of his fellow servants. It was to his surprise and dismay that the lord can back suddenly and asked him for an accounting. Another parable concerned the ten virgins, the five wise and the five foolish. These two parables are intended to warn us lest we forget to watch. On the other hand, there is another line of error. This is the one that came out in this Epistle of Second Thessalonians. This error says that the coming of the Lord is so imminent that it will be within a certain time. To get excited about His coming with the feeling that it has to be within this year or probably before another season goes around, this kind of thing is definitely not what is encouraged in the Bible.

This is what had happened apparently in Thessalonica. There were Thessalonians who were excited about His coming and it was evidently affecting them adversely. So Paul gives, in this Second Epistle

to the Thessalonians, guidance for conduct that we shall look at now.

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread, But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all. The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen (II Thessalonians 3:6-18).

As we begin at 3:6 we read an instruction that will strike a good many people rather strangely: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." It seems to me that there are so many, many among us in the churches that would count themselves Christians but have just ignored this kind of comment. As a matter of fact, I can think of a good many people who would argue something like this: if a brother is walking disorderly you ought to go off and walk with him so that you can get him straightened out. Any number of people would think that you should not withdraw at all. The very word *withdraw* is evil. But here you have it as Paul says.

Here "walking disorderly" does not have anything to do with a person's outward conduct as much as his thinking, his word, his doctrine, what his ideas are. If you come across somebody who has wrong ideas about the gospel, wrong ideas about the coming of the Lord or wrong ideas about the things of God, here the word would be, "Withdraw yourselves from that person who talks that way and lives that way and not after the tradition which he has received of us."

Now in verses 7-11, Paul wrote about people who were expecting the Lord to come back and would not be working for that reason.

In the days before I was a Christian, when I was still an agnostic, I remember in the community in Canada in which we were living, there was a woman who was known far and wide as being a professing Christian. This particular woman was expecting the return of the Lord. On one occasion there were a couple of young fellows who were having some fun with this lady and said, "Aunt Maggie, what are you doing out there; are you planting something?" She said, "Yes, beans." "Well, don't you know the Lord may come back before fall?"

I can remember the quaint little smile on her face. She made me feel rather ashamed of myself for being with those boys at the time. She answered something like this, "Yes," she said, "I know that the Lord may come back, and He may come back before the fall. I realize that. But somehow or other I think He won't mind if He knows that I was just planting so I'd have a mess of beans ready when He comes." I tell you she had a profound idea. And it was the right idea, for the Scriptures teach us to get out and get busy. We know the Lord might come back at any time, but we are not to stop and just wait around.

When you are thinking about the matter of the Lord's coming back any time, I will have to tell you something my father-in-law told me. "It has been over a thousand years," he said, "It might be longer. We do not know. One day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. We do not know for sure just when the Lord will come back. But when the Lord comes back, what difference will it make to you? What do you expect?"

I told him I expected to see the Lord face to face. He said, "That's true. We expect we will see Him face to face." And then he asked, "Well now, how long do you think it will be until you see Him face to face?"

Then he brought this to my mind: "Any life insurance salesman can tell you about how long you will have." While I was thinking about that he told me, "He may not come back to this world during your lifetime, but you are sure enough going to see Him. And when you are absent from the body you are present with the Lord. So far as you are concerned, your personal fellowship with the Lord Jesus will begin the moment you leave this world. So whether He comes back or whether you go to Him, it will not be long. And you could well keep in mind the word of the psalmist who said, "Teach us to number our days, that we might apply our hearts unto wisdom."

This I would suggest to you with reference to this matter of the coming of the Lord being any time now. And especially if it would affect you so far as your work is concerned.

Here is something else with reference to work. This comes out in verse 12, "Now them that are such (the people who are disposed not to work but just to go around talking about these things) we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread." In other words, they should find occupation and work for their keep. Be practical about it.

Some years ago, a pastor told me of an earnest couple and their main concern was the return of the Lord. Yet their talk disturbed others. As we talked along about it something came to me to suggest to him. I said, "Let me ask you a question. Do you have anywhere near your church a community where you could open a branch Sunday School?"

He thought a bit, "Yes," he said, "We just can't get leadership for it." I said, "Well I will tell you what to do. You just get your officers to organize this project. Then you get this young couple, and you get them to go out there and teach in that Sunday School and manage that Sunday School. The working that they will do trying to win people into the church will help them get all this matter straightened out."

Later he said, "Those young people went to work and they won people to the Lord. They now have a going Sunday School and will one day have a church in that area."

I asked him, "What about their relationship to the coming of the Lord? Are they still expecting Him?"

"Oh yes," he said, "They talk about it every now and again. But nobody minds, because they are such active workers in the church."

In this chapter are other things. I have not gone into them. If you read them you will see how simple it is. You are told not to be weary in well doing. Then in verses 14 and 15, "If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

This is the epistle of correction against unwise excitement about the Lord's return. But it is also the epistle of condemnation about error in worship and warning against delusion in not believing about the coming of the Lord. The Lord is coming back. And it does make a difference in a person's life when you live in the expectancy of seeing the Lord face to face.