

Eternity:

Christ's Return, Chiliasm, Resurrection of the Dead, Judgment, Hell, Luther on Eternity, Heaven

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CHRIST'S RETURN FOR JUDGMENT

In our day, in which human ingenuity invents and perfects ever more destructive implements of war, which threaten ultimately to wipe out not only our present civilization but the entire human race, people have become restless, their hearts are filled with fear, they worry what the future may have in store.

On the other hand people try to encourage themselves by speaking about hope. There is hope. God Himself has given us the assurance of a glorious future. To fix our eyes on the hope which God holds out for us is proper. But the way in which the world usually prates about hope, often reminds one of the boy who was lost in the dense forest, but kept on whistling to make himself believe that he was not afraid.

God wants us to hope, but He does not hold out any hope for this world and the life on earth. Christ spoke about unheard-of tribulations that were coming, He spoke about the world as creaking in all its joints, about the order in human society as being upset, about powerfully deceptive errors that would disturb the Church. Paul likewise spoke about terrible conditions that would obtain among men in general, and particularly in the visible church.

Yet God does not want us to despair but to look hopefully into the future. Look up, lift up your heads. Your redemption is drawing nigh. God bids us look beyond the present world with its troubles and grief, beyond death and the grave into eternity. Paul encourages the Thessalonians when they were face to face with death, not to be without hope like the rest. Their hope, however must not be riveted on this life, but must reach beyond the grave. For if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

What is it that lies beyond the grave? There will follow the end of the present world. Our bodily death, our burial in some tomb, will last only fill that end. Christ will return. He will wake the dead out of their graves. He will hold a final judgment over all men. Then eternity will follow, either eternal life or eternal death, either eternal salvation or eternal damnation, either heaven or hell.

There is very much to say about these things. Scripture often refers to them by way of warning and of encouragement. It speaks of them to increase our faith and hope, to cheer us in our afflictions, to encourage us against the dangers that confront us at every turn and are ever increasing in severity to strengthen us in our life of sanctification, both in our struggle against sin and temptation and in our efforts to produce good, God-pleasing works.

Scripture speaks, in particular, about five things. There is, first of all, the return of our Lord in glory. Jesus spoke about this and St. Paul refers to it in many places of his epistles. There is next the resurrection of the dead. Then there is the final judgment which will irrevocably decide the fate of every human being. In these three acts the Lord will wind up the affairs of the present world. Then will follow eternity with its two possibilities of either eternal death in hell or eternal life in heaven.

Yet in spite of the rich material that is presented to us in the Scriptures on all these points, it is difficult to speak about them properly, and it is utterly impossible to get a clear and exact picture of the details. The difficulty lies in this that we completely lack experience. No one of us has ever been dead, so that he could tell us what death is like; naturally then no one has ever experienced a resurrection. No one of us has ever been in heaven or in hell, to bring back a report.

And even if some one would be granted the privilege of a look into heaven, he would not be able to give an account of his observations. Paul once was granted a visit to the third heaven, to paradise. He saw the beauties of heaven, he heard wonderful words, but he did not report a single detail beyond the fact that he was

there. He could not. The words which he heard, though they filled his heart with exquisite joy, were “unspeakable.” He adds that “it is not lawful for a man to utter.” He is referring to laws of nature, to the constitution of a mans organs of speech. Try as he may, he simply cannot reproduce the words which he heard. His tongue, his lips, his larynx, his vocal cords were not built so that he could produce the sounds used in the heavenly words. So different was the life in heaven from that on earth that he was not even sure whether he had been in the body or out of the body. All that he was sure of was the reality of the experience.

In the great chapter on our hope of a resurrection unto life, I Cor. 15, Paul says that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (v. 50). Our flesh and blood, our bodies as they are now constituted, must under go a change to adapt them to the life in heaven. “This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (v. 53). Our present “natural body” must be changed into a “spiritual body” (v. 44).

When the Sadducees tried to ridicule the idea of a resurrection by the story of the woman who had been the wife of seven brothers, Jesus told them that there will be no marriage no family life in heaven; neither will there be any death. Our bodies will be such that they cannot die.

Because that is the case, because conditions in heaven will be radically different from those to which we are accustomed on earth, and we lack all experience of the things to come, it is difficult to speak of those things and to convey an adequate picture. In proclaiming them to us God borrows expressions from earthly affairs which are faintly similar to those in heaven. He uses the life on earth as a sort of parable. As in a parable the point of comparison must be strictly observed, and stressing anything that goes beyond really distorts the truth to be conveyed by the parable, so also in speaking about eternity we must strictly adhere to the truths that God wants to impress on us.

Since we are all headed for eternity and since it is important that we constantly bear this fact in mind we shall now in a series of studies concentrate on the “last things,” such as Christ’s return for judgment, the resurrection of the dead, heaven and hell. May the Holy Spirit guide us and make these studies fruitful for our spiritual life.

Christ’s Return for Judgment

In enumerating the various items that fall under the general head of the Last Things, we mentioned the return of Christ for judgment as the first. This world will run along in its usual way. The sun will rise and set and rise again. So will the moon and the stars. Day and night will be with us in regular rotation, and so will the seasons of the year. Spring and summer will follow winter, to give place again to autumn and winter in their turn. So will also the activities of man continue. There will be seeding and harvesting; there will be working and resting; there will be buying and selling. So will also the social functions continue. There will be marrying and raising of families; there will be learning and investigating, and discoveries and inventions; there will be amusements and grief. All of this just as it has been from the beginning. Sin will be with us to the end. The ravages of sin will increase, while faith will decline.

Then suddenly the end will come. It will be ushered in by the appearance of the Son of man, by the return of Christ for judgment.

The Certainty of Christ’s Return

There are many Scripture passages which simply take the return of Christ for granted. They do not try to convince us that it will happen, they do not adduce any arguments. They speak about it as being self-evident. They immediately make use of the event for various purposes. We now list a few passages.

Paul gave some instructions to his pupil and assistant Timothy. Then he urged him That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, *until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (I Tim. 6:14). There is no doubt about the return of Christ. Paul uses it to fix a time limit.

In his second letter to Timothy, the last letter which we have from the pen of Paul, he urges him to “preach the word; be instant in season, out of season.” In doing this he reminds him of the coming judgment. The time is short, there is not a moment to lose “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” (2 Tim. 4:1.2).—In the 8th verse of the same chapter Paul describes the Christians as people “that love his (Christ’s) appearing.”

To Titus Paul explains that a fruit of the “grace of God that bringeth salvation” to all men, and which has appeared in Jesus of Nazareth, will be a “looking for that blessed hope (meaning that promised blessing for which we hope) and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:11.13). —Paul expresses the same thought in I Cor. 1:7, only there he substitutes the word *revelation* for *appearing*. In our English Bible the passage reads: “waiting for *the coming* (the revelation) of our Lord Jesus Christ. 11

Using the same word *revelation* Paul comforts his readers in Thessalonica, to brace up under their tribulation and wait for the “rest” which will be theirs “when the Lord Jesus *shall be revealed* from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God” (2 Thess. 1:7. 8).

In all of these passages the return of Christ is taken for granted, and it is used to encourage Christians in their afflictions and to urge them on to greater diligence and faithfulness in the discharge of the tasks which the Lord has assigned to them.

As in our day there are people who not only doubt, but flatly deny, the return of Christ, so there have always been doubters and scoffers, also in the early days of the Church even when the apostles were still living. — St. Paul, some of whose references to the day of Christ’s return we briefly noted above, knew also that many people ridiculed the idea. He says: “For *when they shall say, Peace and safety*; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape” (I Thess. 5:3).

We now turn to Peter and hear him refer to Christ’s return, and his warning to beware of scoffers. Peter uses the word *revelation*, which Paul also used, but he does not use “appearance.” He says: “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing (Greek: revelation) of Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 1:7). In passing we note that our English Bible here renders the Greek word for *revelation* with *appearing*. — Again he says (chap. 4:13): “But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings, that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”

Peter knew also about the scoffers. In speaking of them he uses another word for Christ’s return, a Greek word which does not occur in any of the passages which we considered so far, but which St. Paul also uses quite frequently in passages to which we shall refer later. It means *advent*, or also *presence*.

Peter’s warning we find in his second epistle. “Knowing this first that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of *his coming*? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished. But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (chap. 3:3–7).

With this we close our study for today. God willing, we shall list some of the passages which contain the Greek word for advent in some later study. They occur, besides the passage from Second Peter, in the writings of Paul, and James, and John.

Our Savior, from whom all apostles learned about His future return (some when they heard Him talk about these matters while walking on earth, Paul by a special revelation), also used this word.



In our previous study we looked at a few Scripture passages which speak about Christ’s return to judgment as something about which there can be no question. Christ will return in due time. We also looked at a few passages in which such people are rebuked very sharply who doubt that there will be any return of Christ.

More passages could easily be adduced which speak about this matter in the same way. We refrain at this time, but rather take to heart the admonition of our Lord: “What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch” (Mark 13:37).

Christ’s Visible Return

When Jesus ascended into heaven and His disciples stood gazing after Him, the two angels which suddenly stood with them said to them: “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? 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 disciples had seen Jesus gradually rise higher and higher toward heaven until a cloud intervened and hid Him from their sight. Just as His leaving the earth was visible to the human eye, so likewise will be His return.

He is With Us

We pause a little to think about the matter. Before Jesus ascended into heaven He told His disciples, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matth. 28:20). And He is most certainly keeping that promise. He is with us, even though we do not see Him. His ascent into heaven does not mean that He has left the earth and is now confined to some place in heaven. No, He is with us. — Similarly His return from heaven does not mean that He is leaving a certain place and is going to a place where He was not before.

“Appearance”—“Revelation”

This is indicated in the two terms we found last time used most commonly in the passages which we examined. They were “appearance and “revelation.” Both of these terms do not mean that someone who was separated from us will now arrive, they stress as the important thing that He will put in His appearance, men will see Him.

We Shall See Him

In speaking about His return Jesus also stresses the fact that men shall see Him, not a few only, perhaps those who believed in Him, but all. After His resurrection from the dead He showed Himself to His disciples only, but at His return to judgment all people will see Him, also such as hate Him and curse and blaspheme Him. Jesus compares His sudden appearance to a flash of lightning: “For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matth. 24:27). Suddenly, all over the whole world, clearly and distinctly so that there can be no mistake about it, will the Son of man appear.

A Visible Event

Jesus describes the event in a little more detail in v. 30 of the same chapter, thereby impressing on our minds all the more firmly that His return will be a visible event. “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” Jesus does not explain what “the sign of the Son of man” will be like. It is not necessary for us to know. But so much He indicates that everyone will recognize it as the sign of the Son of man. There will be no one asking, What may that sign mean? All will realize that the Son of man is standing at the door, the ones will rejoice, and the others will begin to scream in anguish of heart.

Thus Jesus stresses that His return will be visible.

We quote a passage from Luke which repeats the comparison with lightning: “For as the lightning, that lighteneth *out of* the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day” (Luke 17–24).

Christ’s Glorious Return

When Christ shall return it will be in the fullness of His divine glory. When He was born in Bethlehem under circumstances of extreme poverty, He possessed all the glory of God which He will ever have, but He did not display it, He did not make use of it, although He had it. Thus, when on the last day He shall return in glory, that will not be a newly acquired glory, but the same which He had in the beginning. Even now His glory is hidden from our eyes. He is seated at the right hand of the majesty of God, on the throne of majesty, all things being subject to Him. But who can see this glory? But when He shall return for judgment, then it will be in the dazzling fullness of His glory to the dismay of His enemies and to the rejoicing and exultation of His believers.

The Bible on Christ’s Return

We list a few passages which speak of Christ’s return and stress the fact in various ways that it will be a most glorious event. We shall not always print the full text, but only those words which mention the glory. “For the Son of man shall come in *the glory of his Father*” (Matth. 16:27). “When the Son of man shall sit in *the throne of his glory*” (Matth. 19:28). Speaking in detail about the final judgment Jesus opened His statements with the remark that “the Son of man shall come in his glory.” Note the different expressions that we underscored in those three passages. — St. Paul wrote: “Looking for that blessed hope, and the *glorious appearing* of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13). St. Peter: “Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory *shall be revealed*, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (I Pet. 4:13).

We close our present study with a word of St. Paul which strikes a similar note to that of St. Peter: “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear *with him in glory*” (Col. 3:4).



In our searching of the scriptures on the certainty of Christ’s return for judgment we took note of a special word for it in a passage taken from St. Peter’s second epistle. It is the word *coming*, or *presence*.

We now list two more passages from the same epistle. In the first one of these St. Peter is referring to the coming of Jesus in the flesh by His birth in Bethlehem. “We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and *coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Pet. 1:16). There is a twofold coming of our Lord into the world, the one which occurred at Bethlehem, when He became flesh and dwelt among men so that they saw Him, as Peter says in this text, when they were eyewitnesses of His majesty, or, as St. John says when they saw His glory “as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The other will occur at the end of the world. Of this return of Christ St. Peter speaks in the last chapter of his second epistle. “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” (chap. 3:12).

The Epistle to the Hebrews enumerates the two “comings” of the Lord, but uses a different word for His second coming, saying (literally) that He will *be seen*. “As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he *appear a second time* without sin unto salvation” (chap. 9:27, 28).

We shall not continue to copy all the passages which speak of Christ’s second “coming” but will list some, so that our readers may look them up themselves and draw from them the encouragement and the warning for which they were written. In each one the English Bible has the word *coming*. I Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess.

2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1.8; Jas. 5:7. 8; 1 John 2:28. (In this last passage we find, besides the word *coming*, also the word *appear*.) In 2 Thess. 2:9, St. Paul says that also Antichrist will stage a coming, but it will be a coming “after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.”

The disciples had evidently learned the word coming from the Lord Himself, In referring to His return for the final judgment of the world He said simply: “When the Son of man shall come in his glory” (Matth. 25:3 1). So both He and His disciples, in discussing the matter, used the word coming When the disciples asked for the sign of His coming (Matth. 24:3) Jesus compared His coming to a flash of lightning (v. 27) and warned that conditions on earth would be very similar to the conditions which preceded the flood (v. 37.39).

The Time of Christ’s Return

Already the apostles asked Jesus, when He spoke to them about His return, “*When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*” (Matth. 24:3). And so it has gone on throughout the centuries down to the present day, people have always been curious to know just when the Lord would return. Time and again in the course—of church history men have tried to compute the date for Christ’s return. They thereby disturbed many Christians, as happened already in Thessalonica, during Paul’s time (see 2 Thess. 2:2). And when their predictions did not come true, many lost faith in the Gospel altogether.

The time of Christ’s return has not been revealed. When the disciples asked about it, Jesus answered tersely: “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matth. 24:36). The angels certainly know that that day is coming; they know that it will be a very important day, as we see from their admonition to the disciples when they dreamily looked at the clouds behind which their ascended Lord had disappeared (Acts 1:11); but they are not concerned about the time. They are much more concerned that they, and we, make full use of the time which is left till Christ’s return.

Jesus Himself was not concerned about the time. He had a tremendous work to perform. He had to battle with the forces of darkness, He had to crush the head of the serpent, which in the struggle would crush His heel; He had to lay down His life as a sacrifice for the world — and oh, the cup was so bitter. These things filled His heart and mind, and the question about the time of His return for judgment He was glad to leave to His Father. “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father” (Mark 13:32).

The time of Christ’s return is so deeply and so securely hidden from men that the day will flash upon them when least expected. Jesus says: “As a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth” (Luke 21:35). Jesus uses the picture of a snare, which suddenly entraps an animal. Paul adds other figures. “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; Then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape” (I Thess. 5:2.3). A thief does not announce his planned visit in advance. For, as Jesus says, “if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through” (Luke 12:39).

Since the return of Christ is so certain but the time of His return so uncertain, Jesus tells us what to do. In the text just quoted from St. Luke’s Gospel He continues: “*Be ye therefore ready* also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not” (v. 40). St. Matthew records the words in practically the same way, while St. Mark has them in this form: “Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is” (chap, 13:33). And he repeats: “Watch ye therefore”; and: “What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch” (v. 35 and 37).

At the ascension of our Lord the angels implied that there is work for us to do till the return of our Lord. Jesus says the same in His discourses. After warning His disciples to be ready He told them the parable of a servant “whom his lord made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season.” He calls the servant blessed if he faithfully performs his duties, for his lord will richly reward him. But what if the servant abuses his trust with the idea that his lord will delay his return? Jesus says: “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” (Matth. 24:45–5 1).

Let us then faithfully be doing the work which our Lord assigned to us.



The time of Christ’s return for judgment is not revealed to us, and we should not curiously inquire about it. The exact day and year is of no concern to us. Yet Jesus very emphatically says, Watch. How can we watch? What are we to watch? On this point Jesus does not leave us in the dark.

When the Pharisees on one occasion tempted Jesus and demanded that He should “show them a sign from heaven,” He answered them: “When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowring.” Then He rebuked them: “O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky, but can ye not discern the signs of the times?” (Matth. 16:2.3).

The coming of the Messiah into the world had been foretold by God ever since the fall of man into sin. But God had not specified the exact time, so that Eve, when Cain was born, assumed that he would be the promised Savior. She was mistaken. The time for the Savior’s birth had not yet come. Yet people were not left entirely in the dark. As we say in a common proverb, coming events cast their shadows ahead, so there were also signs indicating that the advent of the Savior was approaching. Paul on several occasions uses the expression “the fulness of the time” (Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:10). All of God’s preparations were ready, all events that were to happen, leading up to the birth of the Savior, had taken place. The pious Jews, who were waiting for the redemption of Israel, observed these signs to buoy their hopes. And especially after Jesus had been born, these signs definitely pointed to Him as the promised Savior, so that Jesus could call the Jews who did not recognize Him and refused to accept Him “a wicked and adulterous generation” (Matth 16:4).

Regarding His second coming Jesus warns us to watch, and He Himself points to various signs that forebode the end of the world.

Abnormal Conditions in Society

In the Second Table of the Ten Commandments God laid down His rules to govern the relations among men. He spoke about the basic unit of human society, the family, in two of these commandments, in the fourth and in the sixth, speaking about the proper relation of children to their parents in the former, and about the sanctity of marriage in the other. In the fifth He enjoined the regard for human life, in the seventh He regulated property affairs, and in the eighth He protected everybody’s good name. Where these regulations of God are being carefully observed, there healthy conditions obtain and society will thrive under the blessing of the Lord. But where any of them is neglected, it marks a sore spot that will fester and, if not checked in time, will lead to the ruin of society.

Why is God interested in the welfare of human society? He is a God of love and loves to bless. But human society is under the curse because of sin. When sin entered the world, death and destruction followed in its wake. Is there then any sense in preserving human society if after all the end will inescapably result in death’?—God prepared a redemption through the sacrifice of His own Son. He now has His elect in the world, and for their sake He preserves human society.

Now Jesus tells us that toward the end of time human relations will not only deteriorate, the very basic relations will crumble away. Love, which is the fulfilment of God’s commandments, will die out. “Then shall many be offended, and Shall *betray* one another, and shall *hate* one another.... And because iniquity shall abound, the *love* of many shall *wax cold*” (Matth. 24:10.12). if such conditions prevail, how can society exist?

Jesus paints a lurid picture of the last days by comparing them to the times which immediately preceded the flood, and with the conditions in Sodom and Gomorrah: “As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.”—Moses mentions particularly

unbridled violence and licentiousness (Gen. 6:1–5).—Jesus continues: “Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they budded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.”—Moses calls special attention to the sins of sex perversion that were rampant in Sodom (Gen. 19:4.5).—Jesus concludes: “Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed” (Luke 17:26–30).

Just as Sodom and Gomorrah could not stand under those conditions but dug their own grave by their sins, so will it be at the end of the world. Like causes will produce like results.

If we only superficially look at our times, will we not be struck by an appalling disregard for God’s basic rules? Was human life ever held so cheap? How many lives are lost through careless driving on the high ways? How deeply (?) do the reports of traffic accidents shock the average reader of the newspaper? — What has become of the honor for parents demanded in the Fourth Commandment? Does it not often seem as though this commandment is operating in reverse? And this not incidentally, but according to theories of education propounded in defiance of the Fourth Commandment. — What shall we say of the Sixth, the Seventh, the Eighth Commandment?

What shall we say about the relations between nations? What about mutual confidence? What about the sanctity of an agreement? What about ethical principles in general? Does not greed, ugly greed, sewn to rule ruthlessly both national and international politics, veiled only thinly by some euphemistic phrases?

There is now peace in the world, a cessation of “hot” wars—but it is an armed peace; the race for armaments goes on, and the “cold” war continues. Jesus said, “When ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass— but the end is not by and by. (“By and by” is an old phrase, now obsolete, meaning *immediately* or *at once*.) Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Luke 21:9. 10 — Also Matthew and Mark speak of “wars and rumors of wane).

We close our study with a brief reference to 2 Tim. 3:1–7, where Paul warns the “perilous times” which should come, and mentions some heinous details of men’s general attitude.



The date on the *Northwestern Lutheran* in which this installment is to appear will be the 31st of October, the anniversary date of the Reformation. It was the 31st of October, 1517, when Luther nailed his 95 Theses against the abuse of indulgences on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg.

Did that act have anything to do with Christ’s return for judgment? Is there any connection between the Papacy and the Reformation on the one hand, and the end of the world on the other? We interrupt our regular series of studies to take up this particular question on the anniversary day of the Reformation.

The Papacy and the Reformation with reference to **Christ’s Return for Judgment**

Our study will be based on 2 Thess. 2, in which chapter Paul speaks about the coming great Antichrist, a prophesy which stands fulfilled in the Roman Papacy.

Paul in the very beginning of the chapter places the appearance of Antichrist on the scene of church history in connection with Christ’s return for judgment. He says “Now we beseech you, brethren, by (that is, concerning) the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by (again: concerning) our gathering together unto him.” On the basis of some false revelation, or some wild rumor, or some forged letter from Paul, Christians in Thessalonica had become excited as though the day of the Lord were at hand. In their excitement some went so far that they dropped their regular daily work and made a nuisance of themselves by going about pestering the people to get ready for the event. Paul expressed his warning in these words: “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.”

Why is Paul so sure that Christ’s return is not immediately at the door? He says that Christ’s return will not take place “except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.” — When Paul here speaks of a “falling away” he does not mean the falling from faith of some individuals. Such falling away had been going on from the beginning of the Church. He means a general apostasy (that is the Greek word which he uses) which will affect the whole visible church. Up to the time of Paul’s epistle the church had been expanding outwardly and growing in knowledge inwardly. Although some individuals deserted her, or caused trouble here and there, no general defection had as yet taken place. But according to Christ’s prophecy that many false prophets and false Christs would arise and cause disturbance so that the elect could be saved only with difficulty, a general falling away had to be expected before Christ’s return.

Paul then describes the Antichrist, who will be connected with this falling away: “Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” The temple of God are the hearts and consciences of Christians. Here Antichrist, or the Opponent as Paul calls him, will crowd out God and will usurp His throne.

We quote the concluding sentence of the bull *Unam sanctam*, issued by Pope Boniface VIII in November 1302: “Finally we declare, state define, and pronounce to *every human being that to be subject to the Roman Pontif is altogether a matter of necessity for salvation.*” — And what is it that he demands of every man as necessary for his salvation? In Rom. 3:28, Paul sums up Christ’s way in these words: “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” The Opponent says: “If any one saith, that man is truly absolved from his sins and justified, because that he assuredly believed himself absolved and justified, or that no one is truly justified but he who believes himself justified, and that by this faith alone absolution and justification are effected: let him be anathema” (Council of Trent, 6th Session, Canon XIV). — Here we have the identification of the Papacy with the Antichrist.

Our Lutheran Confession

When Luther in 1517 published his Theses and continued to preach justification by faith, he expected support from the head of the church— Instead, about three years later, the Pope excommunicated him. Luther got to feel in his body the spirit of Antichrist. Luther and his followers did not break away from the Roman church, they were forced out.—In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1531) Melancthon said no more than: “If the adversaries defend these human services as meriting justification, grace, and the remission of sins, they simply establish the kingdom of Antichrist.... Thus the Papacy also will be a part of the kingdom of Antichrist if it thus defends human services as justifying” (Art. XV, 18).

Six years later, when the Papacy refused to heed this call to repentance, Luther wrote in the Smalcald Articles, and the Lutherans that were present at Schmalkalden agreed: “This teaching shows forcefully that the Pope is the very Antichrist, who has exalted himself above, and opposed himself against Christ” (Part II, Art. IV, 10).

Luther wrote these words as an article of faith. His instructions were to write “which he is determined to adhere to ... upon his departure from this world and before the judgment of Almighty God.” And he himself said in the conclusion: “These are the articles on which I must stand, and, God willing, shall stand to my death.... If any one wishes to yield anything, let him do it at the peril of his conscience” (Part III, Art. XV, 3).

History of the Antichrist

Paul, next, in a brief outline presents the development of the Opponent. “For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth (that is checks it) will let, until he be taken out of the way. And

then shall that Wicked (one) be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and “I destroy with the brightness of his coming.”

This mysterious iniquity was already at work in Paul’s day, only it did not yet come out into the open because somebody checked it. Who was that? In v. 10 Paul says that God will send Antichrist because people “received not the love of the truth” As long as people love the truth, Antichrist’s chances are slim, but when the love of the truth begins to fade, then Antichrist will reveal himself and come out into the open. Compare the bull of Boniface (above).

The third thing which Paul mentions is that “the Lord shall consume Antichrist with the spirit of his mouth,” with the living and powerful word of the Gospel. This happened when Luther again brought the Gospel to light in the Reformation.

Yet Antichrist survived. When the secular princes used the newly revealed Gospel as a football which they kicked around in the political field, then the blessings of the Reformation were squandered. The Papacy continued and, as we observe today, constantly increases in strength and influence—till Christ’s return.

What shall we do? recant or tone down our opposition? That would be fatal.

In 1932 the Missouri Synod adopted and published a document known as the *Brief Statement*. To be sure that we make no mistake about the content and importance of this document, we print here also the rest of the title: *A Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Ev. Luth. Synod of Missouri, Ohio, ad Other States*. (A German-English edition abbreviated the title to *Brief statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*) This document contains a lucid confession on *The Antichrist* It is #43, from which we quote the first sentence, and the last: *As to the Antichrist we teach that the prophecies of the Holy Scriptures concerning the Antichrist, 2 Thess. 2:3–12, 1 John 2:18, have been fulfilled in the Pope of Rome and his dominion... Hence we subscribe to the statement of our Confessions that the Pope is ‘the very Antichrist’ (Smal. Art. Triglot, p. 475, #10)*

Yes, WE TEACH. This paragraph on the Pope as being the prophesied Antichrist is part of the Doctrinal Position which the Missouri Synod held in 1932.

The next paragraph (44) adds this remark: “Not to be included in the number of open questions are the following: the doctrine ... and of the Antichrist, these doctrines being clearly defined in Scripture.”

In July of the present year the Missouri Synod sent out A Fraternal Reply. This document faults the writer of Tract No. 9 (The Antichrist) as having committed an inaccuracy in the following statement: “The Brief Statement considers the tenet that the Pope is the Antichrist a doctrine ‘clearly defined in Scripture.’” In support of this charge the paper quotes the sentence from # 44 which we mentioned above, adding: “The Brief Statement therefore does not say that ‘the tenet that *the Pope is the Antichrist* is a doctrine clearly defined in Scripture.—It says that the doctrine of *the Antichrist is a doctrine* ‘clearly defined in Scripture. ‘ “

No, 43 of the Brief Statement, which confesses that the Pope is the very Antichrist, is thus ignored and practically canceled out; and we who still confess it are faulted with an inaccuracy for finding it in the Brief Statement. With the Brief Statement we include it in our Doctrinal Position. We teach it, and with the help of God will continue to teach it.

As clearly as we love the Gospel of the free forgiveness of our sins for Christ’s sake, so firmly must we reject the Pope as the Antichrist.

God help us. Christ’s return is drawing nigh.



Christ wants us to observe the signs of the times, which indicate the approaching end, so that His return, for judgment may not come upon us unawares. It will come unexpectedly, but it will not find us unprepared.—In our previous studies we took notice of abnormal conditions in human society, which by themselves undermine the health of human society, and call for punitive action on the part of God, since His commandments are being violated. We took particular note of the rise of Antichrist. Today we shall consider some other abnormal conditions which forebode the coming end.

Abnormal Conditions in the Physical World

When God had finished the creation of the world, He had all His creatures pass in review before Him, and He thoroughly examined His work. “And God saw everything that he had made.” And what did He find? “Behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:3 1).

God had created the earth as the abode of man. He had created sun, moon, and stars. He had assigned to each its respective place in the heavens, that they should give light on earth, and divide the time into convenient periods of day and night, of months, of years with their seasons.—On the earth there were the various forms of solid matter, fertile land, precious metals and stones. There was water, and there was the atmosphere. God had endowed each form with certain qualities and forces, and had established certain laws (the so called laws of nature) according to which they all should function.—He had created forms of life adapted to various surroundings: plant and animal life for the land sections; similarly plant and animal life to inhabit the streams, the seas, and oceans; similarly also birds for the air. God had set the world in motion, and everything functioned without hitch or disturbance. The whole world was like a paradise.

Then came the fall into sin, and God pronounced a curse on His creation. Let us not take this curse too lightly. The whole universe received a terrific jolt. It was subjected to vanity (Rom. 8:20). The record in Genesis speaks of the curse on the ground, that it shall by itself produce nothing but thorns and thistles, and that man shall only with great difficulty wrest a living from it. The “flaming sword” which the cherubim wielded to “keep the way of the tree of life” points to devastating storms, to thunder and lightning. — “The wages of sin is death” says St. Paul. “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” So God had warned Adam, and since that fateful moment under the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam carried the germ of sure death in his system. Similarly all the forces of the universe, which had functioned so smoothly up to that moment, were upset, and their final collapse was only a question of time. This was the curse of sin.

The world received a second jolt of immense proportions in the flood. The interior of the earth was deranged when “the fountains of the great deep were broken up” (Gen. 7:11), likewise the firmament above us, which God had established on the second day of creation, for in the flood “the windows of heaven were opened” (Gen 7:11; and see also chap. 8:2). Add to this the rushing back and forth of the waters and the raging winds. We are awed by the devastations which a local flood can cause in a few hours. In Noahs day there was a universal flood, in which the waters, whipped up by furious tempests, raged back and forth, not over a limited area, but over stretches hundreds, yes, thousands of miles in extent. No wonder that Noah hardly recognized the old earth when he left the ark, and had to make an absolutely new beginning in cultivating the land. God comforted him, giving him the rainbow for a sign that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood, and that “while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease” (Gen. 8:22).

That is the type of world in which we are living: the laws of nature are functioning, but they have been deranged by the curse of God on account of sin. Just as man carries the germ of death in his system from the moment he arrives on earth, so the whole world is on its way to dissolution.

Now Jesus urges us to keep an eye on the symptoms of dissolution, to take notice how they increase in frequency and in vehemence. They are indications that the end of the world is drawing nigh. —We shall now list a few of His remarks.

“There shall be earthquakes in diverse places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows” (Mark 13:8). “And there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in diverse places. All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Matth. 24:7.8). We notice how in this connection Jesus immediately mentions the effects which the disturbances in nature will have on the well-being of the human race. Earthquakes, storms, floods, droughts, and the like, will not only take a great toll of human life directly, they will cause food shortages and famines, disease and pestilence.

Yet Jesus calls all these only “the beginning of sorrows.” He adds: “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matth. 24:2 1). “For in those days shall be affection, such as was not from the beginning of creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be” (Mark 13:19).

Besides the disturbances on the earth there will be disturbances in the heavens. Both Matthew and Mark speak about them in the chapters from which we quoted above. We now list Jesus’ words in the way that Matthew recorded them: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and powers of the heavens shall be shaken” (Matth. 24:29; Mark 13:24. 25).

We conclude this week’s study with the words in which Luke sum up the matter: “And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; mens hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken” (chap. 21:25. 26).

When we see these disturbances, some of which are even manmade, (for instance, A and H-bomb explosions, the deliberate destroying of foods, and the like) let us be reminded of the rapidly approaching return of our Lord for judgment.



Just as there will be very unhealthy conditions in human society, abnormal conditions both locally and internationally, just as there will be upheavals in the physical world on earth and in the heavens, all foreboding an approaching collapse: so, Jesus tells us, there will also be a general decline in the life of the Church on earth, affecting both faith and love.

The Church Before Christ’s Return

The Church Before Christ’s Return When we say that there will be a marked decline in the life of the Church, this does not mean that church life will become stagnant for lack of activity, rather, outwardly the Church may develop a feverish activity, but it will be lacking in true spirituality.

Four weeks ago we observed the festival of the Reformation. In that connection we briefly studied the Papacy as one of the symptoms that indicate the approaching return of the Lord. Paul tells us that Antichrist will come upon the Church as a judgment from God because people did not receive the love of the truth. But Antichristendom will not be a quiet falling away from Christ. It will come “after the working of Satan” and will put on a great display “with all power and signs and lying wonders.”

Paul knew that the Church would first be disturbed by Antichrist before Christ would return for the final judgment because Jesus Himself had thus spoken about it. He had said: “Many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.” And again: “For there shall arise false christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders: insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matth. 24:11.24).

Do we not see this fulfilled in the history of the Church? While the apostles were still living, error began to raise its ugly head in various ways. To mention only a few instances. In the Galatian congregations Judaizers spread the false idea that circumcision is necessary for salvation. In Corinth some members began to doubt the resurrection of the body. St. John had trouble in Ephesus and Asia Minor with a certain heretic by the name of Cerinthus, who denied that Jesus is the Son of God come into the flesh.

As time progressed, errors multiplied. And if we consider our own times do we not see the outward Church “by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed”? And what attitude do people in general take over against error? Do they endeavor to find the truth on the basis of God’s Word? God gave us His Word in the Bible to protect us against error and to guide us to a knowledge of the truth. What do people do? They even question whether the Bible is God’s truth in all its statements. They demand tolerance over against error. “Deeds, not creeds” is their slogan. They are offended by the divisions in the Church, and they try to bring

about union, not however, by eliminating error, and by uniting in the truth, but by ignoring error and glossing over the differences. They are very active in their endeavors, they travel far and wide and hold conventions large and small. A union of disunited opinions may be achieved — at the expense of the truth.

Jesus saw such strenuous efforts of false prophets coming.

Paul spoke not only of the great Antichrist, he warned the elders of Ephesus concerning a number of false teachers that would plague them. In his farewell address to them he said: “I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. And of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29.30). — We see this happening also today. The Church which faithfully adheres to the Word of God is attacked with error from without and within.

What is to be done about it? Shall we let things ride? St. Paul encouraged the Christians in Colosse, who were being assailed by a peculiar mixture of the Judaistic error with a new kind of philosophy: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:10).—Do we let the Word of Christ dwell richly in our midst? Do we read it privately for our personal edification? Do we gather the members of our family about the family altar for family devotions? Are we regular in attending divine services? Do we give our children a thorough Christian education? Is the Word of Christ our guide in our intercourse with our neighbors and fellow men? The Word of Christ is the only effective means against the attacks of error. Let us not neglect it.

In taking leave of the Ephesian elders and commending them to “God and to the word of his grace,” Paul earnestly warned them twice: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” Then he repeated the warning tersely: “Therefore watch” (Acts 20:28. 31).

The errorists will be fanatic. They will not only try to lure the Christians after them by word of mouth, by smooth talking and specious argument, they will employ force. They may talk glibly about love and tolerance; but pity the man who does not submit to them! They will not shrink from applying pressure by harming him in his business, in his social standing, smearing his good name and honor. Jesus said: “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another” (Matth. 24:9. 10). He adds, “Yea. the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service” (John 16:2).

Many more passages might be adduced which voice the same prophecy. We conclude with two from Paul’s letters to Timothy. ‘Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron’ (I Tim. 4:1.2). In the second letter to Timothy he speaks about the “itching ears” of people, when “they will not endure sound doctrine” but “after their own lusts” will burden themselves with false teachers (chap. 4:3)

Christ does not leave us without comfort. In speaking about the deceptiveness of error, so that even the elect stand in danger, He adds, “*If possible.*” But God knows them that are His. The Father has Christ’s sheep safely in His hand, and nobody can pluck them out of His hand. The foundation of God, the Church which He built, stands firm and secure. Lest harm befall it in those dangerous times He will “shorten” those days (Mark 13:20).

The Book of Revelation pictures the Church as a holy city which is besieged by the enemies. They have surrounded it on all sides and are constantly pressing closer and closer. The city seems to be doomed, its fall seems to be only a question of time. But then “fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured” the enemies (chap. 20:9). God shortened the days by hurrying the end of the world.



In speaking of the signs which will precede His return for judgment and by which Christians can know that the day is drawing near, Jesus referred, among others, to the fact that false prophets and false Christs will arise, proclaiming powerful and alluring errors, doing mighty signs and wonders. People will be deceived and follow after the errorists. Jesus adds that faith and love will grow cold among Christians, so that they are no longer interested in the truth. Paul then expresses it in this way that people will develop "itching ears" for error and "after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers. "

This is a gloomy picture indeed. Knowing our own weakness, and trembling with fear, we might ask, Who then can be saved? Jesus comforts us not only by giving us the general assurance that no one can pluck us out of His Father's hand, but by telling us specifically in connection with the dangers of the last times that it is not possible that the elect should be deceived. God will even shorten those perilous days for the elect's sake. And Paul announces the same truth by telling us that the "foundation of God," that is the Church which God has founded, stands firm because the Lord knows them that are His.

What will the Church be doing during those days? Jesus assigned a certain task to His believers: Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. Teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. The Church in the world may be oppressed, many of her members may desert her, her doctrine may become tainted with error, yet the Church of believers, hidden under this crippled outward shape, will never lose its spiritual nature, and will never forget Christ's commission. Jesus says, in speaking of the last days: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come" (Matth. 24:14). Or as St. Mark tersely records His words: "And the gospel must first be published among all nations" (chap. 13:10).

This the Church has been doing from the very beginning: the Christians testified of their Savior. They did not do it as a burdensome task, of which they would prefer to be excused, no, it was an inner urge that drove them to proclaim the Gospel. When the enemies of Christ tried to stop them, they refused to obey, saying: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). They added: "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (chap. 4:20).

"Among all nations," Jesus had said, and "unto all nations." St. Paul asked the question, "But I say, Have they not heard?" He formulated the answer himself "Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world" (Rom. 10:18). When the Colossians were in doubt whether they had received the true Gospel, because none of the apostles had visited their city, but they had heard the Gospel from one of their fellow citizens whom Paul had converted, then Paul wrote them a letter assuring them that their fellow citizen had brought them the same Gospel as it was being preached everywhere in the world. In this connection he makes the bold statement that the Gospel "was preached to every creature which is under heaven" (chap. 1:23).

From the time of the apostles down to our day mission work never ceased completely, although at times the efforts in this direction were rather feeble; but in recent times, within the last 150 years, it has taken on immense proportions. First in England, then in other countries particularly among the German people, mission societies were organized, who sent messengers of the Gospel to all parts of the globe. So also here in America. Our own Synod in the early years of its existence had its hands more than full to take care of the German Lutheran settlers who came in great numbers to the State of Wisconsin, of Michigan, and of Minnesota. There were not enough pastors to take care of the crying need. Yet as a member of the Synodical Conference our Synod took part in the work among the Negroes of the South. A little later our Synod began mission work among the Apache Indians of Arizona, then, again as a member of the Synodical Conference, in Nigeria in Africa. In recent years two more missions were begun by our Synod; in Rhodesia and in Japan.

The mission work of other churches is even more extensive than that of our Synod; but we cannot here speak about it in detail.

Jesus said that the Gospel must be preached among all nations. We see this fulfilled before our eyes in a measure which never was surpassed, never really attained before. The ease and the speed of travel has done much to facilitate mission work. The invention of the printing press, telegraph and telephone, particularly radio

and now television have been placed into the service of mission work and have greatly aided the spread of the Gospel.

It is true, Satan also uses these means to spread his lies. And it is also true, it is not always the pure Gospel which is spread among the heathen by the various denominations. The voice of true Gospel proclamation is by comparison still rather feeble. Yet it is very clear that the Gospel, though often in a very garbled form, is heard among all people on the whole earth.

It naturally grieves the lovers of the pure Gospel to see it adulterated with error. Jesus wants His Gospel proclaimed in all its fulness and purity. He told His disciples to teach the people “to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matth. 28:20). It displeases Him when people omit something from His Gospel, or change His Gospel, or preach something which is not part and parcel of His Gospel. As much, therefore, as His true followers desire to assist in the spreading of the Gospel, they cannot join hands with such as mix error with the truth, nor support their work. This applies also to cooperation in externals which are clearly employed in the service of error. Jesus’ injunction that we should beware of false prophets and should avoid them is given in unmistakable terms and is repeated by the apostles.

Yet in a way we rejoice also in the spreading of an impure Gospel, although we dare in no way condone the error. The Lord said about His words that they “are Spirit, and they are life.” The Gospel of Christ remains a power unto salvation even in an adulterated form. God’s Word will never return void.

God is so intent on bringing sinners to faith through the Gospel that His Spirit will graciously endeavor to guard those who hear an adulterated Gospel against the poisonous effects of the error to which they are exposed while hearing the impure message of their salvation. There are, by the grace of God, many devout Christians even in the church of Antichrist. For that reason we can honestly rejoice when we hear of successful mission work carried on by unorthodox church bodies.

Naturally this does not mean that we become indifferent to error. God has not only warned us earnestly to be on our guard, He has also provided us in His Word with a means for detecting error and with a weapon to combat it successfully.

Thus Jesus paints two pictures of church life that are signs of His approaching return. On the one hand, false doctrine will increase to an alarming degree, and on the other, there will be increased, almost feverish activity in mission work. God, over-ruling all human designs, will use the latter “for a witness unto all nations,” a witness by means of which He will gather in His elect, and which will deprive the scoffers of any excuse.



Today is Christmas. Our hearts are turned to Bethlehem, where we bow the adoring knee before our Savior lying as a little babe in the manger. Our thoughts do not remain in Bethlehem. We know that Bethlehem marks only the beginning. We look forward to dark Gethsemane and Calvary. We look further to the resurrection and the ascent into heaven of our Savior. Nor do we stop there. We know that the same Jesus whom today we see in His lowliness at Bethlehem will return in the glory of His Father at the end of the world to complete His work of redemption. We sing in one of our Christmas hymns (No. 91):

And when Thou dost come again
As a glorious King to reign,
I with joy may see Thy face,
Freely ransomed by Thy gram.

In this spirit we in our present study complete the consideration of Christ’s return for judgment, and at the same time introduce another subject in connection with the end of time.

Watch and Pray

The signs which precede the return of Christ and which indicate the approach of the end of the world were present already in the days of the apostles. They have since then increased in number and intensity. If it

was necessary for the apostles to watch, and to warn the Christians of their day to watch, it is much more necessary today. We hear a few words of Jesus.

“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (Matth. 24:42). Then, after pointing to a thief or burglar, who does not announce the visit which he plans to make, Jesus repeats: “Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (v. 44). Again, after telling the parable of the five wise and the five foolish virgins, He repeats: “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (chap. 25:13).

We also look at this warning of Jesus as St. Mark records His words. After announcing that “heaven and earth shall pass away” but that of the day and the hour no man knows anything, nor the angels which are in heaven, not even the Son, but the Father only, He adds the solemn warning: “Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.” Again: “Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning.” Again: “And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch” (Mark 13:33. 35. 37).

St. Mark added praying to watching. Luke stresses the idea of prayer: “Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man” (chap. 21:36).

The danger if we fail to heed this warning to watch is stated by St. Mark very briefly: “Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping” (chap. 13:36). St. Luke is more specific: “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares” (chap. 21:34).

Our watching, however, must not be an idle waiting. The Lord has work for us to do in His kingdom. If we “sleep,” if we are interested only in the pleasures of this life, or in the cares of this life. or, in short, in the affairs of this life, then we cannot take care of the affairs of the kingdom. When Jesus was about to ascend into heaven, His disciples asked Him if He was now going to restore the kingdom to Israel. They had in mind a kingdom as it flourished under David and Solomon. Their words revealed an earthly-mindedness. Jesus answered them rather brusquely that that is none of their business. That is strictly a matter which belongs to His Father's domain. Their task will be to preach the Gospel “unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

We hear one more word, warning us to beware of earthly-mindedness and urging us to cultivate holiness in view of the coming return of Christ: “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?” (2 Pet. 3:11).

There Will Be Only One Return of Christ

In all of the above exhortations it is implied that only one visible return of Christ is to be expected, which is to be followed by eternity with a new heaven and a new earth. Look, for instance, at the last passage quoted above. Continuing his question in v. 12, Peter speaks with some emphasis on the dissolving of the present world “with fervent heat.” But then in the next verse (13) he immediately speaks of the new heaven and the new earth which will receive us: ‘Nevertheless we, according to this promise, look for a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.’

There is one passage which actually counts the different comings of our Lord into the world, and fixes the number at two, no more. Speaking of Christ, the Epistle to the Hebrews says: “Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” Yes, “Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Heb. 9:26.28).

Yet in spite of this very definite enumeration and in spite of the fact that all the other passages which speak of Christ's return for judgment clearly imply that it will not be preceded by another visit of His to this earth — yet there are people who insist that Christ will come back to the earth before Judgment Day in order to establish a kingdom which will last for a thousand years. This imaginary kingdom of Christ is called the

Millennium, and the adherents of this theory are called Millennialists, or with a Greek word, Chiliasts. (Mille is the Latin word for a thousand, and chilia is the Greek.)

All Chiliasts are not agreed on what to expect during those thousand years. Some assume that there will be only saints on earth, who will have an earthly, secular kingdom, from which they will exterminate all godless people, and will then revel in sensual pleasures. This type of Chiasm was rampant in some sections of the early church, and was revived somewhat by certain sects during the Reformation.—A second group assumes that the Lord will appear to destroy Antichrist, bind Satan, gather a church of believing Israelites, to which resurrected martyrs will be added. The restored kingdom of Israel will return to Canaan, and with Jerusalem as the capitol will rule the world. Towards the end Satan will be loosed, he will gather all evil forces against the Lord's kingdom. but will be defeated; whereupon the resurrection and final judgment will take place. — The third group is rather vague. They speak of a "spiritual" return of Christ, and of flourishing times of the Church.

One thing these types have in common, they all speak of a special return of the Lord before the end of the world, and of His establishing a special kingdom. God granting, we shall devote our next few studies to the error of Chiasm (under that special heading).



CHILIASM

In our last study we referred to the Millennialists, or Chiliasts, who assume that the Son of God will come to us on earth three times, not only once by His birth in Bethlehem and then again on the last day for judgment, but for a special visit some time between His first and His last coming, in order to inaugurate a glorious kingdom for a thousand years. The Millennium is only a dream of misguided, morbid fancy. But as is common with all errorists, so also Chiliasts try to support their dreams with Scripture.

Now it is true, the Scriptures speak plainly about a period of time lasting a thousand years. The passage in which the number "a thousand years" occurs in fact mentions these years even several times: The place is found in the last book of the Bible, Rev. 20. The Chiliasts naturally consider this chapter as their stronghold. We shall therefore devote a more extensive study to it; but we shall defer this study to a later date, after we have taken the opportunity to investigate some of the other Scripture passages with which they try to bolster their error.

Universal Peace

At Christmas we rejoiced in the birth of our Prince of Peace, and we listened with rapt attention to the song of the angels about "Peace on earth." Chiliasts would rob us of our joy over this peace by degrading it into an earthly and temporal thing, a cessation of hostilities and wars between nations, a cessation of friction and quarrels between various groups of human society as, for instance, between capital and labor, and, in general, the establishment of friendly relations between people. Much as we pray for such friendly coexistence of people on earth in the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, this is not the Christmas peace, which is spiritual and eternal. But Chiliasts insist that such earthly peace is foretold in the Scriptures and will be fulfilled in the Millennium.—Let us look at a few of their passages.

Is. 2:4-5: "He (the Lord) shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord."

Is. 11:6ff- "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them." In this way the prophet

continues about the cow and the bear and their young ones; and about little children playing at the holes of asps and adders.

Zech. 9:10. During the Advent and Christmas season we frequently heard the verse Zech. 9:9: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation," etc. Then v. 10 continues: "And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth."

These passages certainly prophesy peace, and speak about it in very picturesque language. They connect this peace with the coming of the Lord and His kingdom.—The Chiliasts say that this means peace in the political sense of the word, and that these prophecies point to the Millennium as the time of their fulfillment.

We must examine. What is this era of peace about which the Prophets are writing? And what is the nature of this peace?

There can be no doubt about the Zechariah passage. St. Matthew tells us that this prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus on Palm Sunday entered Jerusalem riding on an ass. This was His last visit to the city. By the Jewish supreme court He was condemned as a blasphemer, and then was crucified by Pilate as a rebel. This is the time and this is the event to which the Holy Ghost pointed in the words of Zechariah. The prophecy has been fulfilled, and we are not to look for a future fulfillment in an imaginary Millennium.

The Isaiah passages point to the same time, the time which our Savior spent on earth in deep humility. Chap. 11, from which we quoted v. 6 above, begins with the words: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (v. 1). This is the same "root" about which Isaiah writes in chap. 53 that He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. — The "Prince of Peace" about whom Isaiah sings is described by the Prophet in these words: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given . . . and his name shall be called . . . The Prince of Peace." Thus these prophecies point to the time when the Son of God assumed human nature, was born of the virgin Mary, and dwelled among us in lowliness.

What is the nature of the peace which Jesus established? the peace about which the angels sang at His birth? the peace "which passeth all understanding," as St. Paul says (Phil. 4:7)? Is it a political peace?

Let us hear the Lord Himself on this point. He spoke very much about peace. When He sent out the seventy to preach the Gospel to various cities He told them to greet the people in any house which they might enter with the words: "Peace be to this house" (Luke 10–5). He comforted His Apostles: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you" (John 14:27). And again: "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace" (chap. 16:33). After His resurrection He repeated His greeting several times: "Peace be unto you" (chap. 20:19.21.26). With the message of this peace He sent His Apostles out into the world. "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (v. 21). — In the house of Cornelius, Peter summed up the word which God sent to the children of Israel as "preaching peace by Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:36).

But Jesus made it very clear from the beginning that He was not speaking of an earthly peace. To the seventy whom He sent out with the peace greeting He said: "Behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves" (Luke 10:3). He cautioned His disciples: "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you" (John 14:27). "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (chap. 16:33). "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (chap. 14:27).

About earthly peace He even said: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matth. 10:34). His message of peace is such that the world will not accept it. The world will denounce it as foolishness, "setting the world upside down," as disturbing, as upsetting the order and peace of the world.

Jesus' peace message is one to give peace to the heart of sinners, so that, believing it, they may calmly face the fiercest persecution, and not be perturbed in their peace by the opposition of the world. The peace which Jesus established and proclaimed is the peace between God and the sin-laden world whose guilt He

removed by taking it on Himself and carrying it to the cross. Chiliasts are dreaming of a worldly peace. Let us not be deceived. By fixing our mind on an earthly peace we are liable to forget our real peace and to lose it.



Prophecies about the peace which our Savior was to regain for a sinful world, who by their sins had merited the wrath of God, constitute only one group of Scripture passages into which Chiliasts try to read their false ideas about an earthly peace. There are several others which we shall take up today. We may treat them a little more briefly than we did the first.

General Christian Knowledge

In his address on Mars Hill in Athens before a group of philosophers Paul charged them with ignorance regarding the true worship of God. This ignorance was not restricted to the Athenian philosophers, it was not restricted to any time, or to any place, or to any people. It was universal. Paul can say in general that the Gentiles do not know God. Yes, he can say that “professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things” (Rom. 1:22. 23).

This ignorance robbed men not only of a correct understanding about God, who He is and how He must be worshipped, it robbed them also of all true hope and joy. Isaiah complained that “the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people” (chap. 60:2). The people “walked in darkness” and dwelled “in the land of the shadow of death” (chap. 9:2).

In the last quoted passage Isaiah speaks also about a fight: the fight has “shined” upon the people and they “have seen a great fight.” The words of the first quoted passage (chap. 60) is preceded by the verse: “Arise, shine; for thy fight is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” These promises refer to the fight of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, about which Paul writes to the Corinthians: “God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts, to give the fight of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).

Thus God promised to dispel the darkness which had settled on earth through sin, to heal the spiritual blindness which the people had incurred — heal it by sending them the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. These promises were fulfilled when Jesus came to redeem us by the sacrifice of Himself and to send the good news of our redemption into all the world.

How do Chiliasts treat these passages? They find in them a reference to conditions as they dream they will obtain in their Millennium.

Let us look at some passages to which they point with special emphasis.

Is. 11:9: “For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

We considered the verses preceding this text in a previous study. They sing about the peace which our Savior procured for us and proclaims to us in the Gospel. Chiliasts apply the peace which is here spoken of, but falsely so, as we saw in our last study, to a Millennium, and then falsely also in our present text, which, as the conjunction for indicates, states the reason, or the cause, for the peace proclaimed in the foregoing verses.

Joel 2:28.29: “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.”

This passage certainly proclaims a glorious spread of deep spiritual knowledge; but do we have to wait for the Millennium before the promise will be fulfilled?

We all remember the Pentecost miracle, how God poured out His Holy Spirit on the Apostles. The Apostles began to proclaim the great deeds of our Lord in foreign tongues, in languages which they had never learned. The people of Jerusalem were dumbfounded when they saw it. They asked in amazement: “What meaneth this?” Some scoffers sneered: “These men are full of new wine” (Acts 2:12.13).

Then Peter arose and said: “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel,” quoting the passage of which we reprinted two verses above (Acts 2:16ff). Thus we have the testimony of Peter that Joel is not speaking of some future Millennium, but he is speaking of the New Testament times in general. The knowledge with which the world will be filled is the knowledge of the Gospel.

Restoration of Israel

Chiliasts usually assume that Jews will play an important role in the Millennium. They will be returned to their old home land, Canaan, and will become the leading nation of the world.—But ever since they frivolously called the blood of Jesus down upon themselves: ‘His blood be on us and on our children’ (Matth. 27:25); ever since they in Jerusalem closed their eyes against the truth and vehemently rejected the Gospel; ever since in the various synagogues they blasphemed the Gospel which Paul preached to them (see Acts 13:45; 18:6; 19:9): ever since that time the Jewish nation as such has hardened itself against the Gospel, and only individuals were moved to accept it. Yet Chiliasts assume that the Jewish nation as such will have a prominent part in the Millennium.

We quote a few passages in which they pretend to find their dreams founded.

Amos 9:11–15: “In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof, and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doeth this.... And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them ... And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God.”

Add to this a word of Joel (chap. 3:18) which speaks of the wonderful fertility and the productiveness which the land will have in those days for Israel.—Are the prophets here speaking of a restoration of Israel after the flesh, which will be achieved in a Millennium? When Paul preached the Gospel to the Gentiles, and many of them were brought to faith, and Christian congregations sprang up everywhere in the Gentile world, then St. James said at the council in Jerusalem that this was the fulfillment of the prophecy which we quoted above from Amos (Acts 15:14–18).

Jerusalem as the Seat of Christ’s Kingdom

This point is very closely connected with the foregoing. All we shall do is print the pertinent passages. The Chiliasts refer to Is. 2:2.3: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”

That these words did not mean to say that all nations would travel bodily to Jerusalem, was indicated already by the prophet Hosea (chap. 1:10) when he said that people would be converted in the place where they lived: “In the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.”

The spiritual meaning of the prophecy is stated in Heb. 12:22: “Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,” etc.



Chiliasts consider as the impregnable stronghold of their doctrine the twentieth chapter of John’s Book of Revelation. This chapter does, indeed, speak of a thousand years, and refers to these thousand years as a

definite period of time, a part of our world's history. Since that is the case, ought it then not be conceded that the Chiliasts are right about their Millennium?

Before we begin a detailed study of the chapter in question a few general remarks about the Book of Revelation may not be out of place.

The book is the last one in our copies of the New Testament, and most likely it was also the last New Testament book to be written. The writer is the same John from whose pen we have the Fourth Gospel and the Three Epistles. In his last years, after the destruction of Jerusalem, St. John served the congregations in and about Ephesus, many of which Paul and his helpers had founded. During the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian, who was a persecutor of the Church, John was exiled to the small island of Patmos. This must have been in the year 95 or 96. Domitian died on September 18, 96.

On a certain Sunday John saw a vision and was instructed to write the things which he saw into a book (Rev. 1:10). The vision pertained to "things which are, and things which shall be hereafter" (v. 19). The vision was all in symbols and figures. John did not see the things as they actually happened or would happen, he saw forms which symbolized and thus represented the events. Sometimes the meaning of the symbols is explained, so that we know exactly what they mean. Thus the first chapter speaks of seven "candlesticks" (v. 12) and again of seven "stars" (v. 16). Then the last verse explains: "The seven stars are the angels (that is, pastors) of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches" (v. 20).

Usually the symbols are not so explained. They are always symbols which picture to us some truth, and they are never to be taken literally; that would destroy the meaning. What would be the result, for instance, if somebody would take the "stars" and the "candlesticks" in the first chapter to be stars and candlesticks in the literal sense? The Book of Revelation may be compared to a grand musical composition with its melodies, its harmonies, its rhythm. The music may be so soft that it quiets your nerves, calms your feelings, and brings rest to your troubled heart. Or it may be such that it creates joy and rouses you to action. Or it may be so weird and eerie that you get "goose pimples" and begin to shudder. You may not be able to analyze every chord or progression of chords, but the effect is there just the same. Yes, if someone would technically analyze the music for you the effect might be spoiled. John saw the vision with its symbols and figures, and was spiritually edified: and by God's command he wrote the vision for us to read in order that we might be spiritually jarred, calmed, rejoiced, cheered, etc.

Never are the expressions in Revelation to be taken literally, as the Chiliasts do. It is symbolical language, and the symbols can often be understood only in a rather general way.

Revelation 20 in General

This chapter is found near the end of the book, only chapters 21 and 22 follow it. This does not mean, however, that the events depicted in the vision which is recorded in chapter 20 will happen somewhere near the end of the world. The vision which John saw on the island of Patmos did not present all events in chronological order. The separate visions rather often refer to the same eras, presenting them only from a different angle, or, at times, giving us a close-up view of some detail presented also in the over-all picture. The time to which Rev. 20 refers must be learned from the nature of the vision itself

If we read the chapter (20) only casually we shall find that the expression "And I saw" occurs four times, namely in v. 1, v. 4, v. 11, and v. 12. This indicates four visions, all pertaining to the same thing. Looking at v. 11 and v. 12, we easily recognize that they speak of the same event, the final judgment of the world; the first picturing the destruction of the physical universe, and the second the judgment of the people, both just and unjust.

Since this part of the chapter (v. 11–15) pictures to us the final judgment, a discussion is not called for at this time. We just take note of the fact that the "thousand years" of which the chapter speaks come to an end with the end of the world.

Thus the verses of chap. 20 which depict the thousand years' rule of Christ are v. 1 v.1–10 By the expression “And I saw” in v. 4, they are divided into two sections. Just as the judgment scenes in v. 11–15 bring the “thousand years” to a close, so v. 1–3 mark the beginning.

The main section, v. 4–10, is easily divided into two parts, v. 4–6 giving us a general view of the time, while v. 7–10 speak of the “little season” at the end of the “thousand years,” something which had already been briefly mentioned in v. 3.

In the first vision, v. 1–3, the expression “thousand years” occurs twice, in v. 2: “a thousand years” and in v.3: “the thousand years,” meaning the same period of time which had been mentioned in v. 2.—In v. 4 the time is first again referred to in an indefinite way as “a thousand years.” This recurs in v. 6, where a number of Greek manuscripts, however, say “the thousand years.” The definite reference to “the thousand years” occurs in this section in v. 5 and 7.

What do these “thousand years” mean? Chiliasts hoist that they are ordinary calendar years of 365 days each. This assumption conflicts with the manner of presentation employed in the Book of Revelation. Just as the “beasts” and other monsters mentioned in the book are not to be understood in the literal sense, but are used as symbols for certain movements, so also the “thousand years” have a symbolical significance.

Nor are they to be understood as round numbers, meaning approximately one thousand years. Such round numbers are occasionally found in the Scriptures. In Deut. 7:9, God promises to show mercy to “a thousand generations,” while in chap. 5:10, He had used the plural “unto thousands.” But in Rev. 20 “the thousand years” are a very definite quantity, not a round number.

Nor will it do to equate the thousand years, as some try to do, with eternity and to transfer the thousand years' reign of Christ to heaven. Eternity has no end; but John saw very definitely that the thousand years were “fulfilled” (v. 3) and “expired” (v. 7). Moreover, the vision speaks of the devil's deceiving “the nations” (v. 3 and 8). The nations are inhabiting this earth, as v. 8 mentions “the four quarters of the earth” and v.9 speaks of “the breadth of the earth. —The thousand years refer to a part of this world's history.



We now first reprint the text which records John's preliminary vision of the thousand years rule of our Savior, Rev. 20:1–3.

“And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and that he must be loosed a little season.”

An important feature of this vision is the dragon. This is not the first time that John saw the dragon, and mentioned him in his book. In chapter 12 he gives us a weird description of this monster. There, according to v. 1 and 2, John saw a woman about to give birth to a child. This child represents our Savior. Then John continues: “And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth” (v. 3. 4). Seven is the holy number of God. The dragon tries to appear as God. He wears crowns of victory and rule. A horn is a symbol of strength. The dragon has ten horns, perfect strength. This dragon stands ready “to devour the child as soon as it was born” (v. 4). Who is this monster? Chap. 12:9, identifies it in this way: “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan.” This is the same description which we find in our present text. The dragon represents the Devil or Satan, who in the guise of a serpent tempted and deceived our first parents in Paradise.

Also the bottomless pit was mentioned by John before, in chap. 9, as the place from which great smoke arose and swarms of stinging locusts, under the leadership of their king, whose name means destruction or destroyer (v. 2. 3.11). This is a plain reference to hell.

We bear in mind that John saw these things in a vision. There really is no seven-headed and ten-horned dragon, but this monster in the vision symbolizes the devil; and the bottomless pit symbolizes hell.

Angels appear quite frequently in the Book of Revelation. Sometimes they represent real angels, sometimes the leaders of congregations. In our chapter, where the angel is presented as binding Satan, he may well represent our Lord Himself. He is the one whom God already in Paradise promised to send as the Seed of the woman to bruise the head of the serpent. He “was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil” (I John 3:8). He told His disciples: “The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me,” that is, he cannot harm me, rather, I shall defeat him in battle (John 14:30). Yes, He died “that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14). Now whether the angel in our text represents Jesus personally or not, at least his work of binding Satan represents the work which our Savior did for us.

A thorough piece of work He did. He “laid hold on the dragon,” he “bound him” with the great chain which he had in his hand, he “cast him into the bottomless pit,” he “shut him up” and he “set a seal upon him.”—We may ask, what do the “chain” and the “key” represent? But whether we find some satisfactory answer, or whether these remain for us mere literary embellishments, makes no difference. The great truth stands out clearly that by our Savior the devil was completely defeated and stripped of his power.

This binding of Satan is to last 1000 years. We noted in a previous study that those 1000 years represent a period of world history. Let us now take a closer look at the number itself. 1000 equals 10x10x10. Ten is the number of completeness. Here is completeness raised to the third degree. We are here to think of a long, a very important, and a definite period of the history of Christ’s kingdom on earth, a period with a marked beginning and a marked end. The beginning was when Christ conquered Satan. Above we heard a few passages which speak of this event. We add a few more now. Shortly before His great suffering Jesus said: ‘Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out’ (John 12:31). Paul, writing about the atonement which Jesus made for our sins on the cross, concludes: “Having spoiled (that is, stripped of their armor) principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them” (Col. 2:15). Jesus promised His disciples that after His resurrection from the dead He would send the Comforter, who would reprove the world of judgment “because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:1 1).—Thus the redemption won for us by Christ through His suffering and death marks the beginning of the thousand years. V.9 and 10 of our chapter show that the thousand years together with that “little season” will come to an end on Judgment Day, which will usher in eternity.

John also points out a little more definitely how we are to understand the binding of Satan: “That he should deceive the nations no more.” Before Christ came, the nations as such blindly followed the lead of Satan. There was a grain of truth in Satan’s words when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness, promising to give Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. He said: For that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it” (Luke 4:6). There was only one nation which did not follow the lead of Satan, that was Israel, which God had chosen for Himself with which He had entered into a special covenant, and which He instructed through His prophets, whom He sent to them. All other nations walked in their own ways, or rather, in the ways which the devil led them.

That should come to an end now. The devil should no longer deceive the nations as such. True, he still goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He attacks individuals. But his power is broken. Though deep guile and great might are his dread arms in fight, yet he can harm us none: one little word can fell him.

This will remain true throughout the thousand years, throughout the entire New Testament era. Only towards the end, during that “little season,” will things change again for the worse. This is an agreement with the prophecies of Jews, who said that false Christs and false prophets would arise, deceiving many. — In one of the following visions John will see a little more about this “little season.”

What this first vision shows about the thousand years does not at all support the dreams of the Chiliasts. In our next study we shall, God granting, investigate the next vision which John saw.



St. John records his second vision of the “thousand years” in the following words, Rev. 20:4–6.

“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”

In this short passage the “thousand years” are mentioned three times. We saw before that the thousand years begin with the defeat of Satan by our Savior, and they last till Judgment Day. Now John tells us something that will happen during this New Testament era in the kingdom of God.

First Resurrection

In order to facilitate our study, a slight mistranslation must be considered. Our English Bible reads: “But the rest of the dead lived not *again*.” That makes very easy reading, but really the Greek does not contain the adverb *again*; but just as it says that the martyrs lived, so it says very emphatically that the other dead did not live, they were simply dead. It is important to note this in order to get a better view of the term “resurrection.” The word “lived *again*” might easily obstruct our view.

In the vision John saw something take place which he calls “the first resurrection.” Does he mean a resurrection in the ordinary sense of the word? Or is this resurrection a symbol of something else? Chiliasts take it in the literal sense. They assume that the dead will be raised in shifts: one group will be raised at the beginning of their Millennium, and the rest of mankind at the end of this world. And what John saw, they say, was the resurrection of the first group.

Does the word “first resurrection” mean the resurrection of a first group? It might have that meaning, and it may not. We must remember that John is seeing a vision, in which things and events have a symbolical meaning.

In our text we find another ordinal numeral. St. John speaks of a “second death.” Does he mean that some people will die twice? Will they after dying once be brought back to life and then undergo the same process of dying a second time? Or does he mean that people will die in groups, one group at a time? perhaps not all at once, but all as members of the same order? In v. 14 he explains himself what “second death” means: “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. *This is the second death.*” — When he says that “death and hell” were cast into the lake, he is using these words according to a very common figure of speech. When, for instance, Matthew tells us that all Jerusalem was troubled (chap. 23), or that Jerusalem went out to see John the Baptist (chap. 3:5), we readily understand that it was not the city of streets and houses that did this, but the people of the city. So also in our text, the people who had been in death and hell were cast into that lake. The previous verse (v. 13) had stated that death and hell gave them up for judgment on the last day. That is what John means with “second death,” not two deaths of the same kind, but something that resembles death in some respects, and is much worse than ordinary death.

This is the way he uses the word “second” in our passage. May not “first” in “first resurrection” serve a similar purpose?

We consider a few pertinent facts in this connection. When Scripture speaks of the resurrection of the dead, it never hints that there will be a resurrection in groups, one at a time, but always speaks of one general resurrection on the last day. Martha expressed the hope about her brother Lazarus that he would rise again “in the resurrection at the last day” (John 11:24). Before the governor Felix, Paul testified “that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust” (Acts 24:15). (Other passages will be added when we, God willing, shall discuss our hope in the resurrection of the body more fully.)

A second fact. When Scripture speaks of the resurrection it regularly mentions the dead persons as the subjects to be raised. Look at the two passages to which we referred above. It is simply Lazarus who will rise again; and St. Paul says that both the just and the unjust shall rise. In the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed we confess the hope in the "resurrection of the *body*" In the great chapter on the resurrection (I Cor. 15) Paul also mentions the body specifically: "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with *what body* do they come?" (v. 35). Then he discusses this point at length in the following verses. But in our text John says that in his vision he saw the souls of them that were beheaded, that they lived. That in itself should warn us to be on our guard. John is not using the word resurrection in the ordinary sense. It symbolizes something.

The word "first" would then here indicate that the dead martyrs experienced something which may be likened to a resurrection, something which, however, takes place before the regular general resurrection of the dead. The martyrs suffered death for the Gospel's sake, because of their resistance to the beast and its image, and thus in the literal sense they were dead, but in a special sense they must be said to live.

What is that special sense of resurrection and life which John here wants his readers to understand? Some people think that he is referring to their spiritual new birth, to their coming to faith in regeneration and conversion. That can hardly be the case. It is true, conversion is described as a coming out of death into life. Paul wrote to the Ephesians (chap. 2:1) and also to the Colossians (chap. 2:13) that we "were dead in trespasses and sins." And then he adds: "Even when we were dead in sins (God) hath quickened us together with Christ ... and hath raised us up" (Eph. 2:5-3; Col. 2:13). But John is not speaking about people who were still dead in their sins, he is speaking about such whose faith was alive and very active. They had been martyred "for (that is, because of) the witness of Jesus and for (again, because of) the word of God." They had the witness of Jesus and confessed it before men, they had the word of God, and unflinchingly they proclaimed it. In the strength of their faith they had resisted the beast and his image, and had refused to take his mark upon their foreheads or in their hands. Because of their active faith and their vigorous testimony they had been put to death. Can their subsequent resurrection now mean a coming to faith, seeing they had lived by faith before and had sealed their faith with their blood?

John tells us himself what he understands by the "first resurrection." He says: "They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.... This is the first resurrection."

At this "reigning" and at the "beast and its image" we shall, God willing, take a little closer look in our next study.



"And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." This is said of them who had been ready to lay down their lives "for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God." They had held fast to the witness of Jesus and to the Word of God in spite of the bitter hostility of the "beast" and his "image." They had steadfastly refused to receive "his mark upon their foreheads or in their hands. "

The Beast and His Image

John wrote about the beast in chap. 13. There John tells us that he saw the dragon standing on the seashore, that is, where land and water meet. This indicates that the dragon claims to own both, he claims to be master of both land and sea. Then the dragon brought up two monsters, one out of the sea, the other out of the land.

The monster out of the sea appeared first. Like the dragon itself it had seven heads and ten horns, that is, as we saw before, it claimed complete divine authority and power. But this was blasphemy. John says that upon its heads were names of blasphemy. This monster combined in itself all the forces of evil and ungodliness. This is symbolized by its weird form. It was shaped like a leopard, had feet like a bear, and the mouth of a lion: all dangerous and destructive animals. It was the dragon who "gave him his power, and his seat, and great

authority. “This monster, with death and ruin in its wake, came on earth when Satan tempted Adam and Eve, and they fell into sin.

Then John saw that the beast received a deadly wound in one of its heads. That happened when Jesus as the Seed of the woman bruised the head of the serpent. But John continues: “And his deadly wound was healed.” Sin continued on earth, and gained the admiration of the people, that is, really they “worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast.” Everything on earth is contaminated with sin, its riches, its powers, its art, its philosophy; all is used against God in the service of Satan.—Then, because men would not leave the beast, John says, it was “given” unto him (by God, as a judgment) to do great harm. That was God’s judgment on the ingratitude of men.

John also saw a second beast. It came up out of the earth. In its nature it was exactly like the first beast. “He exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him,” it had an image made of the first beast, erected a monument to it, because it had recovered from its deadly wound. And it gave life to the image of the first beast.

Although in its nature the second beast was like the first, yet in its manner it was different. While the first combined in its activities the method of a leopard, a bear, and a lion, the second “had two horns like a lamb.” It looked quite harmless. But it spoke the language of the dragon. —Did not Jesus say something to us about false prophets who come to us in sheep’s clothing? It is the dragon who causes the seemingly harmless, even pious looking monster of false doctrine, of a falsified Gospel, to wreak havoc on the earth. Both beasts, which really represent the same power of darkness with its ungodliness and enmity against God, make war against the saints in order to seduce them and lead them into unbelief. If any one resists them and will “not worship the image of the beast” they will cause them to be killed. Or at least they will endeavor to starve them spiritually. For the second beast “causeth all ... to receive a mark in their hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.” This “buying and selling” naturally does not refer to ordinary business transaction, but symbolically represents an embargo on spiritual nourishment, and indicates an artificially produced spiritual famine. They prevent the preaching of the pure Gospel and eagerly spread their own errors.

Read all of chapter 13 about these horrible monsters. Note particularly that both the beast and Satan, its master, stand condemned of God. The last verse says that the number of the beast is “six hundred threescore and six” — 666. — Remember that the dragon had *seven* heads, and he gave to the first beast also seven heads. Seven is the divine number. (Remember, for instance, that God rested on the seventh day, and other divine uses of the number seven. — Note also that the Hebrew word for taking an oath has the same root as the word for seven.) The dragon aspired to divine power and majesty for himself and for his beast. But no matter how hard he may try, he will always fall short of the mark. His number is six, or, it may be, ten times six, or even one hundred times six; but he never reaches a seven. God has fixed his number, and he cannot change it. He can harm us none. One little word can fell him.

Reigning With Christ

When we hear the word *reigning*, there usually arise in our minds the thoughts of a great display of pomp and power. We think of a king in his royal garb and crown of gold glittering with diamonds. We think of a magnificent throne erected in a magnificent palace. We think of a large retinue of servants attending on him. We think of victorious armies led by mighty generals, all awaiting the king’s beck and call. And so on. And when we hear about Jesus as reigning, our thoughts fly up to heaven to see Him in His glory. — Yes, the kingdom of glory will come after the Seventh Petition has been completely fulfilled and we have been fully delivered from all evil. That will happen on Judgment Day, after all enemies have been put under Jesus’ feet and even the last enemy has been destroyed (I Cor. 15:25–26).

But the thousand years about which John is writing lie on this side of Judgment Day, where the reigning of Christ has not yet reached the stage of glory.

When this number of the *Northwestern Lutheran* reaches our readers we will be in the midst of the Lenten season. Jesus was dragged before Pilate by the Jews, who charged Him with rebellion because He said that He is the King of the Jews. Pilate investigated the charge. We read about it in John 18:33–38. Jesus at first reminded Pilate that this question should be a matter of personal concern to him, but Pilate insisted on a strictly official handling of the case. Then Jesus answered: “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.” Jesus stresses that His way of reigning is altogether different from the way the world reigns. Every kingdom of this world is built on power, and from what happened in the Garden Gethsemane on the night before, Pilate knew that Jesus commanded no well disciplined army of enthusiastic, fanatic followers. Filled with contempt Pilate asked, “Art thou a king then?” The idea that Jesus should consider Himself to be a king looked too screwy to Pilate.

Yet Jesus maintains a kingdom more powerful than any of the kingdoms of this world. His is a kingdom of truth. He came into this world to establish that kingdom. It is a kingdom of that “grace and truth” about which St. John says in the first chapter of his Gospel that it “came” by Jesus Christ. To the terror–stricken, trembling consciences He proclaims the grace of God: “Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee.” This word sets the sinner free; but at the same time it binds him so firmly to Jesus that he cannot break away from Him. Nor does he want to. “Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”

That is a kingdom which Jesus carried out with great meekness and in the face of bitter opposition during the days of His flesh. That is the kingdom which He was about to establish by His death as He stood before Pilate. That is the kingdom which Jesus exercised on the cross when he granted to the malefactor on His right the admission into Paradise.

There is no earthly glory connected with it; yet it is a most efficient and beneficial kingdom — in which the martyrs share.



During the thousand years, the time of the New Testament from the day of Jesus Christ in the flesh till His return for judgment, the martyrs lived and reigned with Christ. As far as men could see they were dead. While they were alive they had the testimony of Jesus and the Word of God. They resisted the beast and its image, they had not received its mark on their foreheads nor on their hands, that is, they had kept their minds and their works clear of any contamination from the beast’s blasphemies. For this they had been beheaded. But was their testimony also dead?

When we read the records of some cases of martyrdom we see that the victims, while they were being tortured to death, courageously confessed their faith. After hours of torture they finally died. Their mouth was stopped, they could no longer testify. Yet what happened? It happened that the executioner who had tortured them to death threw down the instruments of torture and confessed himself a Christian. He was overcome by the steadfast faith of the martyr. Physically the martyr was dead. Yet he lived and overpowered even his executioner. —The saying became very common that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.

Do we not experience the same thing? When we read about the martyrs of the early Church and their unflinching faith, our faith is strengthened by their steadfastness. We have the story of the first martyr recorded for us in the Book of Acts: Stephen. He is dead now for more than 1900 years. Yet he still exercises a powerful influence on the hearts of people. Yes, he is living and reigning with Christ. — That may well be called a first resurrection.

Not all Christians were actually beheaded or in some other way put to death. The great majority died a natural death. They are not for that reason to be excluded from the martyrs. For although they were not actually executed, they were ready to lay down their lives for Christ’s sake. To them applies the description which Jesus gave of His true disciples: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:24–25). After Paul’s first mission journey, when he and Barnabas reported in Jerusalem, then

the church in Jerusalem spoke of them as “men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 15:26). In comforting the Romans against persecutions Paul quoted a word from the 44th Psalm: “Yea, for thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter” (v. 22; Rom. 8:36). —All true believers resist the beast and its image. All true believers refuse to take its sign on their foreheads and on their hands. All true believers are ready to lay down their lives for the testimony of Jesus and the Word of God. All true believers thus have part in the first resurrection. They live and reign with Christ during the thousand years.

Priests

Besides saying that the martyrs will reign with Christ, St. John also calls them priests of God and of Christ.

The services of a priest are required when people have become separated from God through their sin, when they have become alienated from Him, when instead of their former union and communion with God a relation of hostility has set in, when God regards them as His enemies. The priest’s function is to change their standing before God, to restore the relation that formerly existed, to remove the obstacle and to reunite them with their God.

We have one High Priest who accomplished this for us and for all mankind. That is Christ. He brought Himself as a spotless Lamb for a sacrifice to God in our stead for our sins. He brought back from God a message of peace. He sent that message into all the world. Even now He is at the right hand of God making priestly intercession for us. We have just one priest of this kind. But now John says that even the dead martyrs will also be priests.

St. Peter joined John in calling us by that name. He calls us a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood” (I Pet. 2:9) that is, a kingdom of priests, where each king is also a priest. In the Old Testament God called His people Israel by this name (Ex. 19:6). That does not mean that our death will atone for the sins of people. Christ has gained a redemption by His death once and for all. But it does mean more than just this that we have been reunited with God and can approach Him as dear children approach their dear father, it means that in a certain sense we can mediate between God and the sinners, We can intercede with God for sinners, and we can in the name of God announce peace to a sinner and plead with him to accept it. Even the dead martyrs are priests. The way in which they met their death is a lasting proclamation of God’s peace and a plea to accept it.

Blessed

“Blessed and holy,” says John, “is he that hath part in the first resurrection.” They are holy unto God, rescued out of the world of sinners, and devoted to God. Though the world cursed them as trouble makers and disturbers of the peace, God judges them to be holy, and cherishes them as His saints. Then it matters little what the dragon and his beast and its image think of them, or what terrible things they do to them. They are holy in the sight of God.

Accordingly they are already blessed The world does not consider them so. The Christians denied themselves; especially did they not, as Peter says, “run with them (that is, the world) to the same excess of riot” in “lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries” (1 Pet. 4:34), all things in which the worldling seeks his pleasure. How can the Christians be blessed? The Christians were ever ready to lay down their life for Christ, and some actually did lay down their life in a most horrifying way. How can they be blessed? Yet John says emphatically that in spite of all this they are blessed. Jesus had said the same: “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:10–12).

St. John says in explanation of their blessedness that “on such the second death hath no power.” Second death, what a terrible thing! St. John speaks about it in the last verses of our chapter: “And death and hell (that is, all the victims of death and hell, all that died in unbelief) were cast into *the lake of fire*. *This is the second death*. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into *the lake of fire*.” That is the “everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). This is that “outer darkness” where “there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:12), the “furnace of fire” where “there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:50), the “hell ... the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:43–44).

What a terrible state! But over those who have the witness of Jesus and the Word of God, who refuse to worship the beast or his image, who do not permit his mark on their foreheads or in their hands, over such the second death has no power. What a blessing! What an encouragement to submit cheerfully to all the unpleasant things which the world inflicts on Christians!

The thousand years of which John speaks symbolize the New Testament era, and the terrors of these years are the spiritual troubles caused by sin and Satan, while the pleasures are the spiritual blessings of the Gospel, which are received and enjoyed in faith.

There remains that “little season” at the end of the thousand years. God granting grace, we shall look at that in our next study.



Verse 3 of Rev. 20 already stated briefly that at the end of the thousand years Satan “must be loosed a little season.” Verses 7–9 tell us what is going to happen in that little season at the end of the thousand years, and v. 10 mentions the judgment awaiting the devil and his henchmen. The word “expired” in v. 7 sounds a little too solemn. The Greek has the same word which in v. 3 is rendered as “fulfilled.” It simply refers to the end of the thousand years. What will happen?

Satan Loosed

Before Christ came on earth God let the Gentiles walk in their own ways. Since they showed no interest in the salvation which God had promised, and persisted in trying to make a name for themselves, when even the lesson of the Flood was so forgotten and people undertook to build the tower of Babel: then God scattered them over all the earth, as if to say, If you do not want to listen to Me, then learn the hard way that you are helpless. And Satan deceived the nations.

Then Jesus came and by His suffering and death bound Satan, and by the Gospel sent the good news into all the world. The devil still walked about like a roaring lion seeking whom he might devour, and in many ways he spread his lies among the people, but he was held in check by the Gospel. One little word can fell him.

This will change at the end of the thousand years. Then Satan will be loosed.

John mentions Gog and Magog in this connection. This is a reference to Ezek. 38 and 39. There the prophet speaks of the invasion of the Holy Land by Gog from the land of Magog. This people lived between the Black and the Caspian Seas, in southern Russia, near the Caucasus Mount. The ancient Greeks knew them as the Scythians. The Greek historian Herodotus tells us that in the year 632 B.C. they swept down like a swarm of locusts over Media and Assyria, Mesopotamia and Syria as far south as Egypt. They ravaged the countries which they overran, including the Holy Land. Then the Lord Himself destroyed the invaders. “I will rain upon him ... an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone” (Ez. 38:22). How large the invading army was may be gathered from the remark that the spear shafts, etc., of the defeated army would provide the inhabitants of the Holy Land with sufficient fuel for seven years, and that it would take more than seven months to bury the bones of the fallen soldiers (Ez. 39:9, 12, 14).

To this invasion of the Holy Land John refers with the names Gog and Magog. It is a type of the loosing of Satan at the end of the thousand years. Just as the time of Gog was a time of great suffering bodily while it lasted, so will the loosing of Satan be spiritually.

As long as people cherish the redemption prepared for us by Jesus; as long as they live by the forgiveness of their sins as Jesus proclaim it in His Gospel; as long as they revere the Scriptures as the Word of God, so long Satan is bound and can harm them none. But when the Word of God is neglected, when it is no longer accepted and proclaimed as God's Word; when people live no longer by faith in the forgiveness of their sins alone by God's grace for Christ' sake: then the chain is broken which held Satan bound, then the prison doors are flung wide open to release him.

What do we see today? The Masons proclaim salvation by character, and the Boy Scouts teach their members to keep a record of their good turns and to present them for recognition and an award of merit. The Pope has for centuries condemned the article of justification by grace through faith. Are we horrified? There are churches which tolerate Masons; and many refuse to recognize the Pope as the very Antichrist, or, if they still do, reduce a statement to that effect to a historical judgment. — And what about the inspiration of the Bible? Today you read much about a so-called Neo-Orthodoxy. That name sounds very promising. But even by the leaders of this movement the Bible is not considered as the Word of God, but merely as a human record of God's revelation of Himself.

Satan is loosed from his prison. Gog and Magog are overrunning the world, including the visible Church. Look at some of the havoc they have wrought. Take family life, for instance. God instituted family life, so that the children might be brought up in an atmosphere saturated with the love of father and mother, in which the Holy Spirit of God would have His work. What has become of the home—the Christian home— today? What association is there between parents and children? Not to mention anything about the many broken homes, broken up by divorce. Think of juvenile delinquency, which alarms even thoughtful politicians.

Or think of another symptom of Satan's destructive work. Think of the many accidents, many with fatal results, that happen daily. The papers are full of reports. Are we horrified? Some accidents with outstanding circumstances may furnish a topic of conversation for a short time, only to give place to some other one, and so on. What has become of the natural feeling of sympathy, with which our Creator endowed us? Similarly, what has become of the feeling of respect toward elders —and persons of authority? What of the feeling of responsibility? What of the sense of honor, or the feeling of shame? The fact that even these natural safeguards of probity and decency are rapidly disappearing points to the unrestrained work of Satan.

Though much more could be said along these lines, we leave it to our readers to supply further details.

John uses some expressions which we wish to consider briefly. He mentions the "four quarters of the earth." The destructive work of Satan is not limited, it is not confined to some one nation or people, to some country or continent. The people of the earth are no longer separate. Improved means of travel and communication have brought them close together. Steamships and railroads, auto and airplane, telegraph and telephone, radio and television have brought even the remotest people into close contact — and have given Satan, once he is loose, an unparalleled opportunity to spread his baneful influence. No part of the earth is safe from it. No wonder that John says about Gog and Magog, the people under Satan's power, that their number is "as the sand of the sea."

Today we read much about "peaceful co-existence." Gog and Magog are not interested in peaceful coexistence, they are gathered together for battle. This is not a battle of A-bombs or H-bombs, it is a battle with soul-destroying lies, often disguised in a very attractive garb. Some will violate the Truth by indifference toward error, but will call it evangelical patience; others will violate the Truth by legalistic rigorism, but will call it faithfulness to the Word. With many similar devices Gog and Magog are doing battle.

And they are steadily gaining ground. John says, "They went up on the breadth of the earth and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city." The saints and the beloved city are the Church of the true believers. Jesus foretold that the attack on them from the false prophets and false Christs — that is the battle of Gog and Magog will be so severe that if it were possible the very elect would be deceived. But He

comforts us by saying that those days will be shortened. God will hurry Christ's return for judgment and the end of the world. John saw this also in the vision. When the beloved city could hold out no longer, then "fire came from God out of heaven and devoured" the enemy.

Thereupon followed the final judgment, and the devil was cast into the lake of fire in hell.

Thus we see, when we study the thousand years of which John speaks, that the holy seer is giving us in symbolic language a vivid picture of the spiritual experiences of the Church during the period of the New Testament.

May God bless our studies and fortify our hearts against the lures of Millennialism.



So far we have studied the Scripture proof which Millennialists adduce in support of their theory. We saw that the passages do not bear out the idea of a Millennium as the Millennialists teach it. The passages speak of the New Testament times. Some proclaim to us the spiritual blessings of the New Testament, while the chapter in Revelation presents the time in pictures and symbolical language.

Today we want to look briefly at some Scripture truths which the doctrine of Chiliasm violates, and at a certain error which is usually found in connection with it.

Chiliasm assumes a resurrection in shifts. At the beginning of the so called Millennium a number of martyrs is to be raised, while a second resurrection is expected after the Millennium at the end of the world.

Scripture speaks consistently of one general resurrection at the end of the world. God granting, we shall shortly begin a study of the promised resurrection. Today we limit our attention to the fact that there will be but one resurrection, in which all the dead will be called back to life at the same time.

Jesus speaks of an "hour" of resurrection in which *all* who are in the grave will be raised. He makes it very clear that He really means *all* when He adds that this will include both those that have done good and those that have done evil. "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28–29).

About all believers Jesus says that He will raise them up on "the last day." "This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40). When Lazarus, the friend of Jesus, had died, then his sister Martha voiced the hope that he would rise again at the last day. That is the only resurrection about which she knew anything. Jesus calls her attention to the fact that the mere resurrection, the mere coming forth out of the grave, is not the most important thing; only He, Jesus, can grant a blessed resurrection, a resurrection unto life; but He does not tell her that she must correct her idea about the time, in that respect she is correct "Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the *resurrection at the last day*. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:24–25).

Before the governor Felix, Paul voiced the hope "that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:15). Daniel says that in the resurrection they "shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2).

Thus the Scriptures consistently speak about one general resurrection. Chiliasm violates this doctrine by assuming a twofold resurrection.

God may make individual exceptions to this rule. About Enoch it is not said that he died, but that God took him (Gen. 5:24). The prophet Elijah was carried up to heaven with a chariot of fire in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11). In the earthquake at the death of Jesus many graves of saints were opened, the sleeping saints arose and came out of their graves after His resurrection (Matth. 27:52–53). But such exceptions do not abrogate, but rather confirm, the general rule.

All forms of Chiliasm, even the most refined, violate the doctrine of Scripture that Christ's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. Chiliasts expect outward splendor of some kind. It is outward progress, an outward peace, an outward spread of wisdom and understanding; an outward splendor of numbers, or organization, or finances.

But the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual kingdom. Jesus testified before Pilate that He rules only by bearing witness unto the truth (John 18:37). When at His ascension His disciples expressed ideas of an outward kingdom, He told them very sternly that such things are none of their concern, they belong into the realm of His Father's power. The disciples would be equipped with power from the Holy Ghost, and would carry out their assignment by being witnesses (Acts 1:6–8). Christ's kingdom may become at times so hidden that even the prophet Elijah was not aware of its presence (I Kings 19:14,18).

Not only is the kingdom of Christ a hidden thing, it is a kingdom of the cross. God may grant to His Church times of outward peace, as He did to the Church throughout Judea and Galilee and Samaria after the conversion of Paul (Acts 9:3 1). Paul also teaches us to pray for our government "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (I Tim. 2:2), but the same Paul warned the young churches in Galatia "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). — The Church on earth will remain at all times a kingdom of the cross.

Conversion of the Jews

In a previous study we remarked that as a rule Chiliasts assume that the Jews will play an important part in the Millennium. We find also this idea to be very common that a general conversion of the Jews will take place. Chiliasts maintain that Paul himself foretold this conversion in Rom. 11:25–26, namely, "that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved."

They stress the word *all Israel*. They say, that means the Jews in great numbers. Thus they tone down the—word *all*. They say that the conversion of the Jews will take place after the Gentiles have had their chance. But they overlook the fact that Paul does not say, "and *then* all Israel shall be saved;" he says, "And so (in this manner) all Israel shall be saved." These are two vital errors, which completely change the picture. God is not speaking of a *great number* of Jews, but of *all Israel*, and he is not referring to any *time*, early or late, when this will happen, but to a *manner* in which it will be brought about.

Paul is referring to the judgment of *blindness*, which the Jews called down upon themselves and their children before Pilate. He says, that will not affect all Jews, it will be only partial. At all times some Jews will be won to faith by the Gospel. Then he adds that also the *fulness of the Gentiles* will come in, that is, all of the elect from Gentile nations. In this way all Israel will be saved.

Now "they are not all Israel which are of Israel" (Rom. 9:6). "For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly: neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh" (Rom. 2:28), but, "Even as Abraham believed God" . . . so "they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7). Abraham is the father of believers, who are the true Israel. All Israel, thus, consists of all believers both from the Jews and from the Gentiles.

Paul is not speaking of a Millennium in Rom. 11:25–26, as the prophecy which he quotes shows, he is speaking of the New Testament: "There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins" (v. 26–27). This God did through the work of Jesus and through the preaching of the Gospel.

Let us concentrate our attention on our salvation, and not waste our time with the idle dreams of a Millennium.



RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

In our study of Christ's return to earth we saw that Scripture speaks of only one such return. As He came once to be born in Bethlehem and to redeem us by His suffering and death, so will He also return once at the end of the world to complete His work. We spent some time, in this connection, to examine the dreams of

Chiliasts, who expect a twofold return, one to inaugurate the Millennium, and only then a final return after this world has run its course. We saw that the Scriptures admit of no Millennium in the sense of the Chiliasts. The one chapter which speaks about a period of a thousand years describes the whole New Testament time from Christ's work on earth to His return for judgment under this number, using various figures and symbols.

When Christ shall return, then the first thing that He will do will be to raise the dead and bring them back to life.

Resurrection

The Scriptures use the idea of a resurrection, or of bringing back to life, in two different ways.

Our present natural condition of sin is sometimes called spiritual death. To the Ephesians Paul wrote: "And you ... who were *dead in trespasses* and sins" (chap. 2:1). And again in v. 5: "Even when we were dead in sins." Similarly he says to the Colossians: "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh" (chap. 2:13). Accordingly then, a bringing to faith is called a resurrection, a bringing to life. Thus the last quoted verse continues: "hath he *quickened* together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses." And the second Ephesians, passage above says: "hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together." Chapter 5:14, of the same Epistle, admonishes us: "Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Similarly Col. 3:1, reminds us: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."

This figurative use of the idea of resurrection for conversion and coming to faith is easy to understand. But by far in the greater number of cases the word resurrection is used in the literal sense, namely that a person who had died bodily is brought back to life. We quote a few passages. "This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will *raise him up at the last day*" (John 6:40). "Martha saith unto him, I know that he (Lazarus) shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:24). "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen! (I Cor. 15:12–13).

Jesus once used the word resurrection in a very special way. When Martha told Him that she knew her brother Lazarus would rise in the resurrection at the last day, Jesus answered her: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:25–26). What Jesus meant to tell Martha by calling Himself the resurrection was this, that a mere coming back to life does not in itself spell a blessing. That might only mean to be brought before the judgment seat of God, to be condemned to eternal punishment in hell. Jesus changed all that. He redeemed us from hell and damnation. He won for us a resurrection unto life eternal in heaven. Yes, for anyone who believes in Him death has been changed into a restful, refreshing sleep, to be followed by a glorious resurrection unto life eternal.

That was what Jesus meant when He said, I am the resurrection. Without Him resurrection would be a terrible thing, but by His work of redemption He changed it into a blessed hope. Martha understood. "She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou are the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (v. 27).

The Certainty of Resurrection

Not all people believe in a resurrection. It seems too incredible. The body at death returns to the dust, whence it was taken. How can it be restored in a resurrection? In the persecutions of the early Church the heathen sometimes burned the bodies of murdered Christian martyrs to ashes, and scattered the ashes to the wind. Then they sneered that now people could see how much the Christian hope of resurrection was worth — nothing. Because the old Egyptians believed that only if the bodies were preserved would a resurrection be

possible, they very carefully embalmed their dead, and many of their mummies have been preserved to the present day.

When Paul in Athens spoke to the philosophers on Mars Hill, they listened to him attentively until he mentioned the resurrection. Then they began to jeer (Acts 17:32). A little later the congregation in Corinth was troubled about the resurrection. Paul asked them: “How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (1 Cor. 15:12). —During his imprisonment in Caesarea Paul was called to speak about his work to a gathering of the most prominent men of the city, even the Roman governor of the province and King Agrippa and his sister Bernice were present. King Agrippa professed the Jewish religion, and his sister Bernice was very much interested in religious questions; but the great majority of the gathering were Gentiles. When Paul spoke about his hope in a resurrection, he asked his hearers the pointed question: “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” (Acts 26:8).

Among the Jews there was an entire sect which denied the resurrection. They were the Sadducees. They were materialists and denied also the existence of angels and spirits (Acts 23:8).

The Sadducees tried to ridicule the idea of a resurrection by their story of the seven brothers who, according to the law of Moses, had, one after the other, married the same woman, because the brothers, one after the other, had died without leaving an heir. They tried to embarrass Jesus with the question: “In the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her” (Matt. 22:28).

This question did not embarrass Jesus in the least, it merely revealed the ignorance and the unbelief of the Sadducees. Jesus answered them in a way that the multitudes were astonished at His doctrine, and even the Pharisees admitted that He had achieved what they had been unable to do, He had stopped the mouth of the Sadducees and had put them to silence (Matt. 22:33–34). He said to them: “Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:29).

In this way Jesus reminded the Sadducees that they were blaspheming God, that by their error they denied the power of God. He also emphatically stated that resurrection is a doctrine of the Scriptures, even taught in those books of the Old Testament which also the Sadducees still accepted.

About the Scripture doctrine of the resurrection we shall, God granting, investigate in our next studies.



We saw in our last study that at the time of Christ there was a sect which did not believe in a resurrection, the Sadducees; in fact, they ridiculed the idea. There was the other sect, that of the Pharisees, who firmly believed in and hoped for a resurrection. Paul, who condemned the Pharisees on account of their work righteousness, yet confessed himself to be in agreement with them in regard to the hope of resurrection. Where did these people get that hope? Does the Old Testament teach a resurrection?

Resurrection in the Old Testament

There may not be so many references to this doctrine in the Old Testament as there are in the New. Yet the believing children of God entertained this hope. They closed their eyes in death in the sure conviction that this was not the end, that a day would come in which God would call them back from death unto eternal life. Let us now look at some of the passages.

We remember Job. He was in agony, he suffered from a terrible disease inflicted on him by Satan himself. He speaks about it in these words: “My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth” (chap. 19:20). He saw only death before him, a time soon to come, when worms would eat his body. But he did not despair. He clung to the hope of a victorious resurrection. He trusted in his Redeemer to see to that. These are his words, which have been a comfort to many a Christian in distress: “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another” (chap. 19:25–27). Job’s skin was practically gone when he spoke these words, and his

body would soon be destroyed by worms Yet he is sure that the day is coming when he, yes, he himself and not another, will with his own eyes behold God. His Redeemer is living, and He will raise him from the dead in glory.

In this hope Job found comfort and strength. He was sure of this hope. He spoke some words about the importance of this hope: “Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!” (chap. 19:23,24). We might think that he would like to have the world read about his afflictions, But no, he does not say anything about that. His hope of the resurrection is what he would like to have recorded for the generations to come. He first mentions a book; but that does not seem durable enough for his purpose. The record of his hope should be chiseled with an iron pen in solid rock, and to protect the letters against the weather, they should be filled in with lead.—Job’s wish was granted in a measure greater than he had hoped for. God took up his words into His own Bible where we still read them in many languages, and draw hope from them.

We can now look more briefly at some of the other Old Testament passages that speak about the resurrection.

The Prophet Isaiah pictures the Church as comforting herself “Thy dead shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead” (chap. 26:19).

Daniel writes: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (chap. 12:2). For the word *many* Jesus, in referring to this passage, substitutes the word *all* (John 5:28. 29); for all of them that sleep in the dust taken together constitute a great number, they are indeed many.—In the last verse of his book Daniel receives the comforting assurance: “But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days” (v. 13).

We add a word of the Prophet Hosea: “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction” (chap. 13:14). The second half of this verse is quoted by St. Paul in the form of a question: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?” (I Cor. 15:55). Yes, as Paul says, “Death is swallowed up in victory” (v. 54).

We should really look at another passage in the Old Testament, which, however, is too long to be printed out in full here, Ezek. 37:1–14. The prophet saw a field of dead bones. But when the breath of the Lord came upon them, sinews and flesh came to them and skin covered them. “And they lived and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army.”

Passages like the foregoing kindled in the believers of the Old Testament the sure hope of a glorious resurrection.

More Light from the Old Testament

We have to look a little deeper into the matter. In the New Testament the doctrine of the resurrection is not presented as something special, as something added to the Gospel. but as part and parcel of it. The Gospel would not be complete, in fact, the Gospel would not be the Gospel, if there were no resurrection. The believers of the Old Testament had the Gospel that we have, though in the form of a promise of what God planned to do for us. But in essence it was the same Gospel we have. And if so, then the promise of a resurrection must also have been contained in it. And so it was.

The very first promise which God gave to Adam and Eve immediately after their fall reads: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). — God promises to send the Seed of the woman. He shall battle with the deceiver and shall overpower him, although He Himself will suffer death in the battle. Yet He shall succeed in undoing the damage which the evil foe had caused by his lie.— What was that damage? God had said, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”

(Gen. 2:17). Death was the damage. If the Seed of the woman will undo the damage, that will mean a liberation from the bonds of death, a restoration of the lost life, a resurrection.

That God meant it in this sense is clear from the way in which He speaks of Abraham. Long after Abraham had died God still called Himself the God of Abraham. So He did to Isaac (Gen. 26:24); later to Jacob, as he fled before his brother Esau (Gen. 28:13). Several hundred years later, when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, He still said: "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex 3:6). —Abraham was dead; yet God calls Himself Abraham's God. But God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. How can that be? God does not reckon time according to the calendar. A thousand years are before Him like yesterday. Though Abraham had been dead for hundreds of years, in the sight of God he was as good as living; for God looked at the resurrection.

God has promised the resurrection, and whatever God promises is yea and amen. Though it may lie still for thousands of years in the future, before God it is as good as done.

Thus the believing fathers of the Old Testament believed in the resurrection.



There are many references in the New Testament to the coming resurrection. Most of them will be mentioned when we discuss special questions in connection with the resurrection. In the congregation at Corinth false teachers had led several, perhaps many, members to doubt this doctrine. Paul says, "How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (I Cor. 15:12). The congregation was greatly troubled, and their leaders were not able to settle the question for them and thus to restore peace. Paul then, devoted one entire chapter to this doctrine, I Cor. 15. We can do no better than to devote some time to its study. It cannot be done in a single issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran*, but will have to run through several issues.

The Hope of Resurrection A Part of the Gospel Message

It might at first strike us as peculiar that Paul should begin the chapter on resurrection in the way he does. Verses 1 and 2 of this chapter read as follows: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. "

Paul is making his appeal as strong as possible. He repeats the address in calling them "brethren." In this way he assures them once more of his love for them and of his interest in their welfare. At the same time he arouses their attention on account of the importance of the matter.

But he does not at once introduce the new point on which he intends to speak. He says, "I declare," I make known, meaning that he intends to speak about a point which they perhaps have overlooked. It thus is not something altogether new, but something of which they have so far failed to grasp the full import. It is, indeed, the old Gospel which he brought to them some years ago, the same Gospel which they accepted from him as he preached it to them, the same Gospel which they still confess up to this very moment. In a fourth relative clause Paul points to the importance of this old Gospel: "By which also ye are saved." That is the matter with which the Gospel deals, that is the sole purpose, but a most important, exalted purpose, which it serves. Do they always bear in mind what salvation means? how much it includes, must include, if it is to be real salvation? In order to do so they must also pay close attention to the form, to the statements with which Paul proclaimed the Gospel to them. Our English Bible is not as clear on this point as is the Greek original. It simply says, "*what* I preached unto you." The Greek says, *with what* word I preached. (Luther's translation is much better. He says "in *what* form I preached.") In the following verses Paul will then briefly repeat the statements in which he preached the Gospel to the Corinthians, He now expresses the conviction that they will remember and cherish the Gospel, and will not have believed it in vain, will not have come to faith only to discard it again.

With what statements did Paul bring the Gospel to the Corinthians? He sums them up in verses 3 and 4: “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”

He points to the importance of the matter in several ways. We note the phrase “first of all.” The statements which he is now going to present are basic. On them the whole Gospel rests. Without them the whole Gospel would be nothing. Take them away, and you have taken the Gospel itself away. Misunderstand them, and you have warped the whole Gospel. Hence these statements will have to be observed with the greatest diligence and care.

Paul then points emphatically to the fact that they are God’s truths. He delivered unto the Corinthians something which he also had received, and in the form in which he had received it. God did not hand to Paul some simple and undeveloped ideas, about which Paul was to think from which he should draw conclusions, and out of which he should develop some system. That would have opened the way to miscalculations. And even if Paul had made no mistakes, he would have nothing but his own reasoning to back up his proclamation. No, Paul is merely God’s messenger boy, delivering what he himself received. His message is divine truth.

Another point which corroborates this claim is the fact that his message is in agreement with the Scriptures. Twice he uses the phrase “according to the scriptures.” God announced beforehand that He was going to do certain things, and He had His prophecies recorded in the Scriptures. Now He delivered something to Paul to proclaim. And this message is in exact agreement with what He had recorded by the Prophets in the Scripture of the Old Testament. This shows both the importance and the divine trustworthiness of Paul’s message.

The basic facts of Paul’s message are three: the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus.

“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” That is the first basic fact. Christ’s death is really ours, our sins caused it. The Lord had laid our sins on Christ, and He laid down His life as a sacrifice for our sins. The purpose of His death is to remove our guilt. The wages of sin is death. Thus Christ died for our sins in order to rescue us out of the clutches of death. Christ’s death, according to the Scriptures, meant that we should live. Paul wants to say: Study the Scriptures of the Old Testament, what meaning the death of Christ should have, and see it fulfilled in the death of Jesus of Nazareth.

Paul continues, “And that he was buried.”

As a rule we do not make very much of the burial of Jesus. We mention it in the Creed, Jesus “was crucified, dead, and buried,” but otherwise we usually jump from His death immediately to His resurrection. On Good Friday we commemorate His death in special services, and on Easter we rejoice in His resurrection. But special burial services we ordinarily have not.

Since Paul here stresses the burial, let us take a look at it. We shall find two things of special importance. —When Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus to bury it, Pilate inquired very carefully if Jesus had died already; and only after he had received the official report from the captain who supervised the crucifixion did he grant Joseph’s request. And the soldiers had made sure that Jesus was dead. They did not break His legs, but they pierced His side with a spear. If His heart had not stopped beating before this, the spear would have stopped it. — The burial of Jesus testifies that His death was real.

His body was laid in a new sepulcher. No other body had ever been laid there before. His was the first and only one. His body was wrapped in linens, and the women carefully marked the place where He was laid. The stone door of the grave was sealed, and a Roman guard was put in charge of the place. When on Easter morning the grave was found empty, there could be no doubt as to whose body was missing. Only one had ever been buried here. And the condition of the tomb chamber and shape of the linens made it clear that a miracle had taken place. The body had not been removed by robbers. It had arisen as a glorified body.

Thus the burial of Jesus furnishes the human evidence of the reality of His death and of the miracle of His resurrection.



In preparing to present the Christian hope of a coming resurrection Paul from the very start urges that such hope is part and parcel of the Gospel message. He sums up the whole Gospel message in three points: the death of Jesus Christ, His burial, and His resurrection.

The death of Jesus Christ, when viewed in the light of the Old Testament Scriptures, is not merely a fact foretold, perhaps a death by accident or a martyr's death, no, it must above all things be accepted as a sacrificial death, as a death of punishment for our sins, as a ransom death paid to set us free. God looks at Christ's death in this way that when Christ as our Substitute suffered our death in our stead, then He regards us all as having passed through this terrible agony, and as having thus in Christ paid the penalty for our sins in full.

Paul next stresses the burial of Christ as the witness that His death was real, and as a preparation for His resurrection. When Christ's body disappeared from the grave, and when the angel announced that He had arisen from death, there was no danger of mistaken identity. It was not the body of some unidentified person that was missing from the grave and from the grave cloths, it was the body of Jesus of Nazareth, the only body that had been laid there, who had now arisen.

The Certainty of Christ's Resurrection

As the third basic fact of the Gospel message Paul fists the resurrection of Christ, "that he rose again the third day according to the scripture."

How did the Old Testament foretell the resurrection of Christ? In a number of ways. Let us look at but a few of the prophecies.

In that well-known word of the suffering Job he confidently asserts "I know that my redeemer liveth." A dead redeemer would have been of no use to Job. In his deep affliction, with which the devil himself tormented him by God's permission, even an ordinary redeemer, though alive, could not help him. What he needed was a divine Redeemer, and that, naturally, a living one. That was the hope which Job held, and which upheld him in his trials: his Redeemer was living. Ever since Job's days the Church of God has been singing this paean of victory: I know that my Redeemer lives.

When Isaiah prophesied about the suffering Servant of the Lord, who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, who was brought as a lamb to the slaughter and made His soul an offering for our sin, he said of Him that "he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." Although He died He shall rise again, and as our living and victorious champion He will carry out the work of the Lord.

The 16th Psalm, which sings of the work of our Savior, contains these words: "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." The second half of this verse is very clear. The Holy One of God will die, but His body will not remain long enough in the grave for decomposition to set in. He will rise again, as St. Paul beautifully explained in the synagogue of Antioch (Acts 13:35-37).— While we are speaking about this Psalm we may add a word about the first half of our text. In our English Bible the preposition "which" is not quite clear. The statement really means that God will not deliver the soul of Jesus to hell, or into hell. Christ suffered the agony of hell on the cross, and after that was finished, He commended His soul into the hands of His Father.

In the same sermon in Antioch St. Paul calls attention to another passage of the Old Testament, which not only foretold the resurrection of Christ but spoke of this in such a way that Christ after His resurrection was "now no more to return to corruption," or, as he expresses it in Rom. 6:9, that now He "dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over him." The passage on which Paul bases this confident assurance is taken from Is. 55:3, which reads: "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." In quoting this passage Paul stresses the word sure. If Christ had died and had remained dead, then the mercies which God had promised to David would have been very insecure, in fact, there would not have been any. In order that they may be sure, Christ must rise again from the dead. By His resurrection He made them known as sure.

When Jesus reprimanded the two disciples on the way to Emmaus because of their foolishness and their slow heart, He said: "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" Then He

expounded the Scriptures to them. The same evening He said to all of His apostles: “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day” (Luke 24:26, 46).—On one occasion Christ even pointed to a story of the Old Testament which symbolized His resurrection on the third day, the story of Jonah and the whale.

Thus the Scriptures of the Old Testament not merely foretold the resurrection of Jesus on the third day, but also impressed on the believers its importance and deep significance.

Witnesses to Christ’s Resurrection

This is the matter which Paul takes up next, in v. 5–10. (We shall not print out the text in full, but refer to it as we go along.)

It is important that an event of such basic meaning as was the resurrection of Christ be well attested. It was one of the chief attacks which the Gentiles leveled against the Gospel in the early years of the Church that they tried to discredit the witnesses of Christ’s resurrection. About the year 180 a man by the name of Celsus published a book against the Church, which he entitled the *True Word*. The prophecy of Jesus that He would rise after three days he denounced as “bragging.” Because Jesus could not help Himself during His lifetime, how could He rise from the dead? Then he asks the question, “Who saw Him?” and he answers, “A hysterical woman.” He adds that the Christians might perhaps mention one or the other of Jesus’ band of scoundrels, who either suffered from hallucinations or, more likely, played on the peoples’ itch for a thrill, or on their gullibility.—Thus Celsus tried to discredit the story of Christ’s resurrection.

God saw to it that the resurrection of Jesus is well attested. St. Luke mentions in the first chapter of Acts that Jesus “showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days” (v. 3). Peter adds to this in the house of Cornelius that “God raised him up the third day, and showed him openly—not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead” (Acts 10:40–41).

Jesus Himself had chosen twelve men to be His apostles. They were to serve as His witnesses before all the world. They should proclaim Him as the Savior of the world. If they were to carry out their mission they must be in a position to testify to His resurrection. They therefore are the men to whom Jesus would show Himself alive after His suffering and death. Jesus showed Himself also to others who were near to Him or who were in special need of His comfort; but above all did He show Himself alive to the pre-appointed witnesses of His redemptive work. To these Paul refers in the verses mentioned above. God willing we shall look at them a little more in our next study.



Paul not only mentions the fact that the resurrection of Jesus was foretold in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, he continues by stressing the further fact that the resurrection of Jesus is well attested by the report of unimpeachable witnesses. He enumerates some in vv. 54. He does not name all the persons who saw Jesus after His death and resurrection, nor does he mention all the separate occasions on which Jesus appeared to His disciples. He points out that those men who had been chosen by Jesus to be witnesses had ample opportunity to assure themselves of the reality of His resurrection, and that they agree in their testimony.

Cephas and the Twelve

The risen Jesus was seen of Cephas. When the women came to the empty tomb early on Easter morning, they met an angel there who told them: “Go your way, tell his disciples *and Peter* that he goeth before you into Galilee” (Mark 16:7). When the two disciples from Emmaus at a late hour on Easter Sunday returned to Jerusalem to tell their wonderful story to the Eleven, they were greeted by them with the message: “The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared *to Simon*” (Luke 24:34).

Simon (Peter, Cephas) is the disciple who had made the wonderful confession about Jesus: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matth. 16:16). On another occasion he had said: “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ the Son of the living God” (John 6:68–69). Peter had been privileged to see Christ in His transfiguration. He was also called by Jesus to be near Him in His deep agony in Gethsemane; but then Peter slept, and a little later he misused his sword in an attempt to defend Jesus.

But Peter was also the man who so shamefully denied his Lord in the high priest’s palace, not once but three times, not with ordinary words but with a terrible oath.

Now Peter was the first of the Apostles to whom Jesus showed Himself alive after His suffering and death. He was prepared to see his Lord, The women had delivered to him the message of the angel. He and John had gone out to the garden of Joseph of Arimathea and had thoroughly examined the empty tomb. Then, at some time during the course of the day Jesus appeared to him alive.

Some time later, after the Apostles had left Jerusalem and had gone to their several homes in Galilee, Jesus had a special interview with Peter in the presence of six other Apostles at the Sea of Tiberias. Jesus there asked Peter the searching question: “Lovest thou me?” Three times Peter had denied his Lord, and had thereby forfeited his Apostleship. Three times Jesus solemnly asked him concerning his love, and solemnly reinstated him as His Apostle: “Feed my lambs, feed my sheep.

Thus Peter could testify about the resurrection of our Lord.

In the same verse Paul also mentions the Twelve, the Apostles as a group. He calls them the Twelve, although this number was never present in its entirety. Judas Iscariot was missing, and had not yet been replaced by the election of Matthias. Even the remaining eleven were not always all present. Still Paul calls them by their official group name, the Twelve.

St. John tells us that Jesus met with this group on three different occasions. The first was in the evening of Easter Sunday. Ten of the Apostles were gathered behind bolted doors. Their hearts were filled with fear, and Thomas was not even with them. Suddenly Jesus stood in their midst greeting them: “Peace be unto you.” To assure them of His identity He showed them His hands and His side.—St. Luke adds that the two disciples from Emmaus were with them and had reported their meeting with the risen Lord, while the group of Apostles announced to them that Jesus had appeared to Peter. When they saw the Lord suddenly standing in their midst it took some time before they got over the idea that they were seeing a ghost. Jesus not only showed them His hands and side He also invited them to touch Him, yes, He even ate a piece of broiled fish and some honey before their eyes.

Thomas was not with them on that evening, and when the others told him that they had seen the Lord he flatly refused to accept their testimony: “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.” Eight days later the Apostles were again gathered together, this time Thomas being with them. Suddenly, as on the Sunday before, Jesus stood in their midst, offering them the same greeting as on the previous occasion. Without any further remarks He suddenly turned to Thomas and rebuked him for his unbelief Nobody had told Jesus the story about Thomas’s doubts, yet He knew all about it. Then He offered Thomas the very proof which he in his unbelief had demanded a week earlier. Thomas was convinced. —This was the second time that Jesus appeared to His Apostles as a group. The witness of these eleven men is unimpeachable if even so hard-headed a doubter as Thomas was overwhelmed to exclaim: “My Lord and my God. “

The date of the third meeting is not recorded. It took place in Galilee on the shore of the Sea Tiberias. Not all of the eleven Apostles were present, but only seven. John lists five of them by name. The first was Simon Peter, who had been granted a private appearance of the Lord, and had also been present when Jesus visited the group on two consecutive Sundays. The second one whom John lists is none other than Thomas, the former doubter.

In the third place he mentions Nathanael of Cana. In order to be in a better position to evaluate the testimony of this man properly we take a look at him at the time when he first met Jesus. John the Baptist had

directed two of his followers to Jesus, namely Andrew and John. Andrew had then brought his brother Simon to Jesus. The next day Jesus Himself called Philip to follow Him, and Philip found Nathanael. When he announced to him that they had found the man of whom Moses and the Prophets had written, Jesus of Nazareth, Nathanael hesitated: "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Only after Jesus had given him a demonstration of His divine omniscience did Nathanael accept Him in faith as the promised Messiah. Nathanael was careful, and was not easily deceived.

Then John mentions the two sons of Zebedee. They belonged to that intimate circle of three who were present at the raising of Jairus' daughter, on the mount of transfiguration, in the Garden of Gethsemane. One of them was John himself, the disciple whom Jesus loved, who also leaned on Jesus' breast at the Supper.

These five Apostles John identifies in his account. Besides them there were two others whom he does not name. At first these seven men did not recognize Jesus from the boat as He was standing on the shore. John was the first one to realize that it was Jesus. But afterwards they were all fully convinced, so that no one even dared to ask Him, Who art thou?

To the testimony of these men, Cephas and the Twelve, Paul appeals as establishing the fact of Jesus' resurrection beyond the shadow of even a human doubt. The list of further witnesses whom he mentions we shall consider, God granting, in our next study.



Paul adduces many witnesses who saw Jesus after His death and burial, and who thus can testify to His resurrection. He does this so that even according to human standards the fact of Jesus' resurrection cannot be denied. In our last study we looked at some of the men whom Jesus during His work on earth had chosen to be His Apostles. In the following verses Paul mentions a number of witnesses in addition to the chosen Twelve.

V. 6. "After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep."

Paul does not specify when or where this meeting took place, nor does any of the Gospels mention it expressly. Yet it is very likely that it is the meeting which St. Matthew records in chap. 28:16ff. It is true, Matthew mentions only the Eleven by name; but the remark that some "doubted" does not really fit any one of the Eleven. After Jesus had appeared to the Eleven twice in Jerusalem on two successive Sundays, and after on the second visit even doubting Thomas became convinced, it is difficult to assume that a few days or weeks later any one of the Eleven should again entertain some doubt. Thus this remark about some doubters seems to point to a larger gathering, in which the Eleven are mentioned specifically because of their office for which Jesus had chosen them.

St. Matthew tells us that they met on a mountain in Galilee "where Jesus had appointed them" (v. 16). Before His suffering Jesus had already told His disciples that after His resurrection He would go before them into Galilee (Mark 14:28). On Easter morning the angel instructed the women to remind the disciples of this; and then Jesus Himself said to them: "Go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me" (Matth. 28:7, 10). Thus a meeting of the brethren was arranged in Galilee.

Paul mentions several important points about this meeting. One is the great number. A single person may be deceived in his observations. This might happen also to a smaller group. But if more than five hundred witnesses agree in their testimony there is no room for reasonable doubt.

The second point which Paul makes is that at the time of his writing, at least 20 to 25 years after the event, the majority of those five hundred brethren were still among the living, able to repeat their testimony, and might be questioned at any time.

In speaking about the departed ones of those five hundred Paul uses the expression, they "are fallen asleep," a very appropriate and significant word in view of the coming resurrection.

V. 7. "After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles."

The James whom Paul here mentions was not one of the Twelve. He was one of the brothers of our Lord and is mentioned in the first place among them in Matth, 13:55. After the Apostles left Jerusalem he became the

first bishop of the Jerusalem congregation. He is mentioned several times in the Book of Acts. When Peter had been rescued so wonderfully out of prison he gave instruction to notify James, since he himself had to leave the city (chap. 12:17). At the important council which was held in Jerusalem about the circumcision of Gentile Christians, James presided (chap. 15:13ff); he summarized the arguments and submitted the motion. He was surnamed the Just, and was generally held in high esteem. Shortly before the outbreak of the Jewish War, when the city already was filled with disorder and tumults, James was attacked and demanded to deny Jesus. He refused, and was hurled to the ground from the pinnacle of the temple. Not being dead from the fall, he was stoned and finally died with a blow from a fuller's club. Most likely the Epistle of St. James is from his pen.

James was a leading person in the early church. He had seen the risen Savior, and was thus in a position to substantiate the report about His resurrection.

With the remark that the risen Jesus *then* was seen of *all the apostles* Paul is evidently not again referring to the Twelve, whom he had mentioned before. James was not an apostle like the Twelve, but in a wider sense he could be called an apostle. The word was quite frequently used in a wider sense. Thus Acts 14:14, Barnabas is called an apostle (together with Paul.—Compare also v. 4). In I Thess. 2:ff, Paul speaks of Silvanus and Timothy as apostles together with himself— Who is to be included in “all the apostles” and on what occasion Jesus appeared to them, Paul does not indicate, but he asserts the fact in unmistakable terms, and thus refers to these men as witnesses of the resurrection of Christ.

V. 8. “And last of all he was seen of me, as of one born out of due time!”

Also Paul must be counted among the eye and ear witnesses of the risen Jesus. His testimony may even carry more weight than that of others because of his original vehement antagonism against Jesus. Paul calls attention to this by comparing himself to “one born out of due time.” In his earlier years he was a miscarriage, he was spiritually dead. Thomas doubted when the other Apostles told him about Jesus' resurrection. Paul was worse, he persecuted those who believed in and testified to the resurrection of Jesus. We may say that in doing this he was persecuting Jesus Himself But as doubting Thomas was brought to faith, so the persecuting Saul was changed into a testifying Paul.

Paul had to overcome his own prejudices before he would accept the resurrection of Christ as a fact. It required very strong evidence to convince him. He was convinced, his opposition crumbled, he realized that he had no leg to stand on. The testimony of such a man carries exceptional weight.

Paul tasted in his own person the blessed, soul-refreshing power of the resurrection of Jesus. He could not remain silent, he must bring the good news to others.

V. 9–10. “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

With these words, which are clear in themselves and require no further comment, Paul closes the enumeration of the human witnesses to the resurrection of our Savior. Their number is great indeed, and their character as witnesses is unassailable. From the purely human standpoint it is unreasonable to doubt the Easter story.

But our faith dare not and cannot rest on human testimony. Also in this case the words of our Third Article apply: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, nor come to Run.” For that reason Paul stresses the grace of God. It was not he with his strong human convictions that achieved such wonderful results, it was the grace of God alone, which was with him, that made him what he was.

With these words so far Paul has laid a firm foundation on which to rest his doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. In the following verses he will proceed to unfold it for his readers.



In verses 5–10 Paul pointed out that the resurrection of Christ is well attested, that even from the human standpoint there is no room for honest doubt. The witnesses are unimpeachable. But mere human testimony is not sufficient to produce saving faith. Saving faith is a gift of God, it is a creation of the Holy Spirit through the divine testimony of the Word of God.

Paul already referred to this aspect of the situation when in the beginning and the close of the 10th verse he stressed the grace of God: “By the grace of God I am what I am” and: “Not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” He now emphatically sums it up in v. 11.

V. 11. “Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.”

The first thing that impresses us on reading these words is the complete agreement of all Gospel preachers on this point. Though each Apostle and every one of their helpers may have his own peculiar gift, so that one may deliver his message in a more eloquent or more elegant form than another, yet in substance they agree completely. Each one presents Christ as the One who died for our sins and was buried, and then as the One who rose in triumph from the grave.

Then we take notice of the word *preach*. This word does not merely mean to make some statement, to affirm something perhaps in a formal address; it means to bring a message, to announce, and that as coming from some important person. The Greek word contains the idea of a herald, that is, to announce or proclaim in the capacity of a herald.

Concerning this sort of preaching Paul, in Rom. 10:15, asks the pointed question: “And how shall they preach, except they be sent?” A herald is not to proclaim his own ideas, no matter how sure he may be of himself. He may have observed an event, he may have experienced a power, he may have been informed by reliable witnesses — all that counts for nothing when he is acting as a herald. As a herald he has but one duty to perform, namely to deliver faithfully the message that was handed to him. He must not add anything to it, nor omit anything from it, nor even change the smallest iota.

This is what Paul here claims for himself and for the other Apostles. In spite of their rich personal experience they are not proclaiming their own thoughts, they were commissioned and sent as messengers, as heralds. It is not their own word which they are proclaiming unanimously, it is the word given to them by their Lord Himself. The message concerning the fact of Christ’s resurrection may agree perfectly with their own observations and experiences, but that does not affect their message. They deliver their message as being the Word of God.

In their work the message proved itself to be the Word of God, a word filled with divine power. Paul says, “And ye believed.” The Apostle’s message created faith. It produced more than a human conviction. A purely human conviction, no matter how strong it may be, cannot bring peace to a sin-troubled conscience. But this is precisely what Paul’s message achieved, as the Corinthians well knew. Their hearts may still have been assailed by fears and doubts, they may have had to undergo severe struggles time and again, but the battle was always won, and peace was restored to their hearts, not by human philosophy, but by the simple message of Paul. “And so Ye believed. “

The Meaning of Christ’s Resurrection

In the foregoing Paul stressed the certainty of Christ’s resurrection, which the Corinthians all accepted, as he assumed, and which as he announced in the beginning, is the basis of a Christian’s hope for his own resurrection. In the following section Paul thoroughly discusses this connection between our hope and Christ’s resurrection. The connection is so clear that Paul can not refrain from asking a surprised question.

V. 12. “Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is resurrection of the dead?”

It may seem odd that someone who has tasted the sweet fruit of the resurrection of Christ should sink to the level where he would doubt his own resurrection. But such is the cunning of the devil, and such is the corruption of our own Old Adam, that a Christian is deceived. He may think that he believes the Word of God,

and yet he may be overcome by unbelief. A little story from the pioneer days of our fathers may illustrate the point. A good pious member of one of the churches was troubled, he could no longer accept the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. He went to see his pastor, and his pastor very thoroughly discussed with him the same chapter which we are now studying. At the end of the interview the troubled parishioner admitted: "Yes, Pastor, I see that the Bible teaches a resurrection. And so, naturally, we must believe it."— But then he added: "Mark my word, Pastor, nothing will come of it anyway." — Such is the deceitfulness of unbelief, that in the same breath we may confess and deny the truth. May the Holy Spirit preserve us. Read Paul's astonished question once more.

V. 13. "But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen.

This statement of Paul is not merely an application of the logical rule that, if one case can be cited which vitiates a theory, then the theory will have to be revised. It is not merely based on the axiom that something which actually happened in a given instance must be assumed to be possible. No, much more is implied.

The resurrection of Christ is God's stamp of approval which He placed on Christ's work. Death is the wages of sin. Death's chains will hold a prisoner till the last farthing has been duly paid. Only then will the prisoner be released. But then the prisoner must be released. There are no grounds for holding him any longer.—Christ came to set us free from the chains of sin and guilt. He lived, and suffered, and died in our stead for the very purpose of clearing our debt. God would not raise Him, and He could not rise from the grave, as long as but one farthing of our huge debt remained unpaid. Therefore, the fact that He arose from death loudly proclaims to the world, to the joy of the angels and to the dismay of the devils, that Christ did succeed in wiping out our debt. But if our debt has been canceled, then death has no longer any hold on us. Though he may already have swallowed us, he will be forced to release us again. —Thus to say that there is not going to be a resurrection means to deny the resurrection of Christ and to maintain that Gethsemane and Calvary had been all in vain.

Paul has still a great deal to say on this point, but it would require more space than we have at our disposal today to carry out and to present his weighty thoughts. God willing, we shall do so in our next study.



Paul expressed his astonishment that some Corinthians accepted the resurrection of Christ and at the same time denied the hope of their own resurrection. If there is no resurrection, he said, then neither did Christ arise—because the very purpose of Christ's life, suffering, and death was to conquer death for us, and to snatch death's victims out of his jaws. If there is no resurrection, then Christ failed in His endeavor, instead of winning the victory He went down in defeat, instead of rescuing us He Himself was swallowed up by death.—Thus to deny the doctrine of the resurrection is of the most far-reaching, disastrous consequences for the whole Gospel itself

V. 14: "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."

Note how Paul stresses the idea *vain*. He repeats the word in a most emphatic way: *vain is our preaching, vain is your faith*.

Take the resurrection out of the Gospel, and the Gospel is turned into an empty thing. It is an empty shell, from which the kernel is gone. There may be some high sounding phrases about a victorious life, there may be some beautiful words about love and peaceful co-existence — but it is all hollow. In Greece there were various schools of philosophy — Paul met representatives of the two leading ones in Athens, the Epicureans and the Stoics — who spoke very much about happiness and the best way to attain it. The one school recommended enjoyment with moderation, the other demanded resignation to an inexorable fate. Both denied, and ridiculed, the idea of a resurrection. —Their wisdom was hollow, fine-sounding words without substance. The motto of the common people soon became: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." — Take the hope of resurrection on the strength of Christ's work out of the Gospel, and the Gospel will sink to the same level. Vain, hollow.

Paul says, Our preaching is vain. Look at the strenuous efforts which Paul made in order to preach the Gospel. Look at the tiresome journeys he made, at the dangers to which he exposed himself, at the painful sufferings which hostile people inflicted on him. Was the Gospel worth the price if Christ arose not from the dead? Vain! Christ announced Himself as the Savior of the world but then He failed miserably in His endeavor, He could not save Himself —Proclaiming a dead Savior is vain indeed.

And vain it is to trust in a dead Savior. The Corinthians accepted Paul's message. They found peace for their troubled conscience. Though the philosophers ridiculed the Gospel and the Jews bitterly opposed it, the Christians were willing to endure all this because of the rest which the Gospel had brought to their soul. But if Christ did not arise from the dead, then they no longer had any ground to stand on, their faith was caught in the quicksand. All the benefits which they had imagined to receive were nothing but a mirage. Their faith was vain, hollow, empty.

The matter is much more serious. To deny the resurrection of Christ is not only a mistake by which the whole Gospel is emptied of its content, it is a grievous offence against God, a sin which heaps guilt and condemnation on us.

V. 15: "Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not." When Paul speaks about the death of Christ, he does not merely mean the fact that Jesus gave up the ghost; he always includes the full significance of His death. Else one might ask: What harm is there done if someone should say that God performed the miracle of bringing a dead person back to life, and then it turned out to be a false report? He did not raise anyone from the dead. What harm in that?

The case is different. This death was not an ordinary death, it was a sacrificial death, a ransom price for our sins. The sins of the world had been laid on Jesus. He was proclaimed as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. He made His life a sacrifice, a sin offering. By raising Him from the dead God proclaimed to all the world, to the holy angels, and to the devils, that there is not a single sin left unatoned in all the world, not a single sin that could be charged against any man. He declared that, viewed in Christ, in His Vicarious death, every former sinner now appeared in sparkling holiness. Preaching the Gospel of Christ's resurrection means preaching a Gospel of the forgiveness of sins. It means that all demands of God's righteousness have been fully met. God has nothing against us, and can have nothing against us.

What a blasphemy to teach that God has forgiven our sins for Jesus' sake, that His punitive righteousness has no longer any cause to be angry with us, if Christ failed to take away our sins, if He could not arise from death, if thus our sins still stand before God in all their uncovered heinousness! That would be giving the world a totally wrong, a most degrading picture of God. "Yea," Paul says, "and we are found false witnesses of God." To what severe punishment would Paul and all the others who preach the risen Christ expose themselves if Christ had not risen from the dead!

The Corinthians did not directly deny the resurrection of Christ, but they did so by implication, since they doubted the resurrection of the body as we confess it in the Third Article.

V. 16: "For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised."

Dire Consequences of Denying Christ's Resurrection

So far Paul had used only a negative word. He called the whole Gospel empty and vain if Christ's resurrection is eliminated. He had added what terrible judgment (that of being false witnesses against God) he and the other apostles of the risen Christ would bring upon themselves if the resurrection of Christ were a myth. Now, in v. 17–19, he carries out in detail what such a Gospel would mean for the Corinthians

V. 17: "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins."

In this verse Paul again calls faith a vain thing, if it does not include the resurrection of Christ; but the Greek word which he here uses is different from the one he used in v. 14. The word which he there used for vain means that faith has nothing in it, it is hollow or empty. The word which he now uses in v. 17 means that

faith does not produce results. Thus there is a difference in the viewpoint: the first word looks at the content of faith, the second one looks at the fruit.

Paul mentions first the greatest disappointment which such a vain and unproductive faith has for us: “Ye are yet in your sins.” Through faith we hope to receive the forgiveness of our sins; but a faith which does not include the resurrection of Christ cannot bring us relief from our sins, neither from their guilt nor from their power. Their guilt still condemns us, and their power dominates and enslaves us.

Such a fruitless faith is very deceptive; it holds out great promises, which it cannot fulfill. Paul illustrates this in a touching way by referring to our departed loved ones.

V. 18: “Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.”

A terrible thought. Their loved ones had accepted the Gospel. Because of their faith they were ready to endure the ridicule and hatred of Jew and Gentile. The time of their departure came. They commended their spirit into the hand of the Lord, and peacefully fell asleep. The Corinthians grieved over their departure, but they felt that their departed loved ones were safe in the hands of the Lord. But if Christ did not rise from the dead, then this is all an empty dream. There is no safety for their departed ones, they are lost, perished.

And the same fate awaits the survivors. Sooner or later death will overtake them also. And if Christ did not rise from the dead, then nothing but utter perdition will stare them in the face when they depart this life.

Such faith is indeed a vain and fruitless, a shamefully deceptive thing.

Paul has one more statement on the fruitlessness of such a faith in the following verse. We defer consideration to our next study.



Take the resurrection of Christ out of the Gospel and both our preaching and our faith will be reduced to vain, hollow and fruitless things. Paul has already pointed out several instances to illustrate the point. What about the forgiveness of our sins? What about our hope in death? Now he sums the matter up in one sweeping statement.

V. 19: “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”

If there is no resurrection, then our present life here on earth is the only one we have. Death will end it all. There is no other alternative. If there is to be no resurrection to an eternal life, then this present life will be our only opportunity. Just as we did not exist before we were born into this life, so we shall cease to exist when death snatches us away.

What, then, will it help a man if he gathers much wealth? He must leave it at death. He may get some satisfaction because people flatter him for his riches, or envy him, but death will end it.—What, then, will it benefit a man if he devotes his time and energy to the service of his fellow men? They may honor him while he lives, they may erect a monument to his memory: but what does that mean to him when he is dead?—He may acquire great learning, or create wonderful pieces of art that will be the admiration of generations to come — but he is dead.—So we might go on in other fields.

Of the Christians Paul says that they would be “of all men most miserable.” Not only do Christians bring the greatest sacrifices in denying themselves, not only do they endeavor to lead a clean life and a life of service to their neighbor, but, since the Gospel is foolishness to natural man, they are misunderstood, they are not appreciated, yes, they are hated as nonconformists and killjoys. Hence Paul can well say that if our hope is limited to this life, then we are of all men most miserable.

That is the gloomy picture if there is no resurrection.

Is it a true picture?

The Gospel Assurance of Christ’s Resurrection

Paul had previously enumerated a long list of well qualified human witnesses. The resurrection of Christ is, humanly speaking, far better attested than many another historic event which is accepted by all without

question. He had also pointed out that Christ's resurrection is one of the basic facts of the Gospel. Now he devotes a few verses to this truth.

V. 20: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept."

"Now is Christ risen"—this statement emphasizes more than the mere fact of His resurrection, it lays the stress on the resultant condition: He is alive from death. Yes, He was dead, truly dead, dead for our sins; but He came back from death. The purpose of His death was achieved. Our stupendous debt of guilt was completely wiped out by His death. Death was forced to release Him. And now He is alive, full of health and vigor, ready to administer the rich blessings which He has purchased for us, the forgiveness of our sins, and life and salvation. He lives! Escaped from death! Victorious over death!

Paul's interest in this chapter is our resurrection. So he hurries to point out the bearing which Christ's resurrection has on the question of our resurrection. He uses a figurative term to express it: "the firstfruits of them that slept," that is, of all them that have fallen asleep, and lie sleeping in their graves.

God had given the Children of Israel a law that in gratitude for the good land which He had given them they should bring a basket filled with the firstfruits of their harvest as a token before the Lord. The firstfruits indicated that the harvest had begun, that more was to follow. Similarly the resurrection of Jesus must not be considered as an isolated fact, all by itself. By raising Christ from the dead God gives us a token that a great harvest of resurrection is to follow. When the Jews brought their basket of firstfruits to the priest, they did so with great joy in anticipation of the harvest that was in prospect. Thus also Christ's resurrection is a meaningful event for us all.

V. 21–22: "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection from the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

Death did come "by man" into the world. When God created the world He did not make it subject to death. He also warned man not to do anything that would lead to death. But man disregarded the warning, he did the very thing which God had told him not to do. By committing sin man opened the gates to death: death came by man.

But how can man rid himself of death? It is easy to fall into an evil, but it is not so easy to remove that evil. Yet Paul says, "By man came also the resurrection of the dead." Not by the same man who introduced death, nevertheless, by a man.

Paul now mentions the two representative men by name. The one through whom sin and death came into the world is Adam. Adam is considered not so much as an individual person, but as a representative of the human race. In him the human race was embodied, he was the whole human race at the time. What he did was charged, not against him alone, but against the whole, every member of the human race. Thus Paul says, "In Adam all die."

The second representative of the human race is Christ. What He did and what He suffered, He did and suffered not for His own person, but in our stead. For that very purpose He became man that where Adam though a son of God bearing the image of his Creator and Father, had been disobedient, He in the form of a servant, a slave, might be obedient, obedient unto death, the death of the cross.

He succeeded. He conquered death and restored life. He can say, as He did to Martha: "I am the resurrection" (John 11:25).

Adam's act affected *all* people, "In Adam *all* die." And so also Christ's work restores life for all. "In Christ shall *all* be made alive." When Paul says, "They shall be," this is not an ordinary future tense expressing nothing but a time to come. Here we have the use of the future which is very common in Greek, a so-called logical future: if the one thing is true, then it follows that the second will be true also. Adam sinned, and his sin was charged by God against all men. Christ, the second Adam, was obedient, and now by the same principle God credits His obedience, and the resulting life, to all men. If they do not all attain this blessing, it is their own fault. "How often would I have gathered thy children together ... and ye would not" (Matt. 23:37). In speaking to Martha Jesus said: "He that *believeth* in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25,26).

In the following verses Paul sketches a picture of things connected with the resurrection. We defer a consideration to our next study.



Paul has pointed out in the text so far that Christ's resurrection and our resurrection are connected inseparably. If we are not to rise from death then neither did Christ arise; on the other hand, if Christ did arise, then our resurrection will most surely follow. But what place does our resurrection hold in God's plan of salvation and in Christ's work of redemption? Paul takes up this point next, discussing some things that will happen in connection with our resurrection.

Our Resurrection Christ's Final Triumph Over All Our Enemies

V. 23–24a: “But every man in his own order. Christ the firstfruits afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end.”

We take note, first of all, that Paul is here expressly speaking of the resurrection of believers, of them “that are Christ's.” He is not speaking about the unbelievers, what is going to happen to them. Yes, also for them Christ prepared a resurrection unto life, but by their unbelief they rejected His gift. For them there remains, as Daniel says, an awaking “to shame and everlasting contempt” (chap. 12 2); or as Jesus Himself said, they “shall come forth ... they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:29). But Paul is not speaking about them in this connection, he is limiting his remarks to them that are Christ's.

Really Christ's resurrection and the believers' resurrection belong together, they are one. Christ is the firstfruits. Just as the firstfruits were not taken from any part of the harvest for any other part of the harvest—for instance, the firstfruits of wheat were not taken from the vineyard, nor vice versa, the firstfruits of grapes from the wheatfield— but the firstfruits were taken from the field that was to be harvested, so that firstfruits and harvest belonged together as one: so the word firstfruits, when used of Christ's resurrection, denotes that His resurrection and ours hang together inseparably as one.

The resurrection of the believers will follow “*afterward*.” How long this *afterward* will last, Paul did not know, nor do the angels, nor did even the Son of Man in the days of His humiliation. At Easter of this year it was 1898 years ago since Paul wrote his First Epistle to the Corinthians. So long this *afterward* has lasted till now, how much longer it will last, no one can tell. But let us not waver, it is a limited *afterward* and will come to an end at the appointed time.

Then our resurrection will take place. We shall be called forth from our graves in union with Christ's resurrection and by virtue of it. — Christ's body lay in the grave for only three days, and did not see corruption. Many Christians have now been sleeping for hundreds of years, some for nearly 2000, and the believers of the Old Testament for several thousands of years. Their bodies have been totally decomposed, so that in most cases not even their ashes can be found. But when that *afterward* will come to an end, then the Lord will know how to find them, and will bring them forth.

Paul continues, “Then cometh the end.” This will be a very short then, in fact, it is that very moment in which that long *afterward* will be completed. It is, as Paul said, at Christ's coming. When Christ returns and calls His believers back to life, they will not then have to wait for years and years till everything is settled. No, on that very day the final judgment will be held, and the eternal kingdom of glory will be inaugurated.

V. 24: “Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. “

The great event of that day will be the delivering up of the kingdom to the Father. The Father had started a beautiful kingdom in paradise, but Satan ruined it by introducing sin. Then the Father promised at once that He would send the Seed of the woman to oust Satan and to repair the damage which he had done. He appointed His Son to be King during the process of restoration: “I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion” (Ps. 2:6).

Jesus said: “All things are delivered unto me of my Father” (Matth. 11:27). Jesus achieved the restoration of the kingdom by His suffering and death. On the last day, after the resurrection of the dead, Jesus will deliver the restored kingdom to the Father. That will be the consummation of Jesus’ work as our Savior.

Paul, in our verse, speaks about Jesus as “putting down all rule and all authority and power.” The enemy, though defeated decisively on Calvary, is still keeping up the struggle. Not only is he going about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, but he also continues to inflict death on all men. Jesus will put that “rule” down and make an end of it on the last day.—For keeping up order in this world, God is maintaining civil governments. On that last day there will no longer be any need of it. Jesus will put that “rule” down. That will complete His work.

Paul mentions some details in the following verses.

V. 25–26: “For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”

This is an application of a prophecy from Ps. 110: “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.... Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.”—When He says, *till* I make thine enemies thy footstool, this *till* does not primarily speak of time, but rather of degree. There will be complete subjection of the enemies. Nothing is to be excluded from Jesus’ rule. Even the most stubborn enemies will have to yield.

At present we do not yet see that He has such an all-inclusive rule, that He absolutely controls all things. Often we have the impression as though the enemies were in control. Let us not be deceived, nor let us lose courage, our Jesus has all things firmly in His hands. And in due time —on the last day — it will appear in glory that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Majesty, and that nothing happens without His will.

At present, in particular, it does not appear that death has been abolished. People still die, Christians die. And things have been going on like this for close to 2000 years since Paul assured the Corinthians that Christ is reigning. But also this will change.

On the last day, at Christ’s return, death will be “destroyed.” That will happen in the resurrection, when death will be forced to disgorge all his victims which he had swallowed.

Also the dead unbelievers will be called back from the grave in order to be judged by our Savior. He will separate His believers from the unbelievers, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. After that has been finished, there will be nothing else left to do. The power of the enemy will have been completely broken, he will be cast into hell. The damage which he did will have been repaired, and the kingdom restored in its pristine beauty.

That is the place which our resurrection holds in Gods plan of salvation and in Jesus’ work of redemption.

A few special questions remain in this connection, which, God granting, we shall consider in our next study.



Paul presented the resurrection on the last day as being the finishing touches of Christ’s work of redemption. In the resurrection the power of the last enemy will be finally and decisively overthrown. There will be nothing more to do. All that is left will be to gather in the fruits of Christ’s labors. In the judgment to follow, Jesus will separate the believers from the unbelievers, and will deliver the restored kingdom to God, even the Father. — In this connection Paul now discusses a few special questions and makes some special applications.

All Things Under Jesus’ Feet

This is a staggering thought. He who hung on the cross in dismal solitude, He who on the cross suffered the agony of hell, being forsaken of God, He who with parched lips cried, I thirst, He who bowed His head and gave up the ghost: He is made Ruler over all things. It seems incredible. Yet, it is true.

V. 27: “For he hath put O things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.”

By mentioning a manifest exception Paul underscores the all of his main statement. Everything else, everything outside of that single exception, is made subject to the rule of Christ. Not only has He the right to rule, but He actually exercises dominion over all things. It staggers the imagination.

There is the physical world. There is the earth with its minerals, its many-formed plant life, its uncounted animals on land, in the water, in the air, from the huge elephants down to the tiniest insects. There are earth and sea and air with their mysterious forces, some of which have been discovered and harnessed only recently, and many there may be of which no man to this moment has any idea. There are the heavens with their millions of stars, with their peculiar laws of motion. All these are under the control of Jesus. The most inconspicuous weed grows because Jesus makes it grow, the canary sings because Jesus teaches it, the hugest star moves in its orbit because Jesus carries it. At His command even the “powers of heaven shall be shaken” (Matt. 24:29), and great disturbances will occur on earth, earthquakes, famines, and the like.

Also the nations have been put under Jesus’ feet. The nations act as though they were independent. They talk peace, and they plot wars. Natural forces, which could serve beneficial purposes for the welfare of mankind, are turned into instruments of destruction. Yet in all of this nobody can stir hand or foot without the will of Jesus. He offered the world His Gospel, the Gospel of a salvation which He purchased with His own blood. Men despise His gift. For that ingratitude He turns them over to their own conceit. They imagine that they are the captains of their own fortunes, but by His ruling they are caught in their own devices.

Above all, Jesus is the Head of the Church. His Church on earth is threatened by many dangers. As Paul told the Ephesian elders, grievous wolves are attacking from without, while ambitious errorists bore from within. But Jesus rules so that not even the gates of hell shall prevail against His Church, nor shall the devil, though like a roaring lion he seeks whom he may devour, do harm to our soul. Let us only in faith and in prayer remember that Jesus is our Head, and seek refuge in faithful adherence to His Word.

All things have been put under Jesus’ feet, only as yet we do not see it. It is an article of faith. On the day of resurrection it will become manifest.

One Exception

We saw that one purpose of Paul in mentioning the one exception is to call our attention to the vastness and all-inclusiveness of that great ALL. Paul’s main purpose is to lead us to a reverent meditation on the mystery of the Trinity.

Paul speaks of Christ, under whose feet all things have been put, and of One who “did put all things under him.” — Here are two persons, distinct from each other. Both are God. There is a third person, the Holy Ghost, but Paul is not speaking of Him specifically at this time. Here he is speaking of Father and Son.

Let us learn to adore the mystery of the Trinity, which is way beyond the reach of our conception, and for an adequate description of which our language lacks the proper terms. All we can do is lisp about it, and often our lisp is unintelligible. There is one God, one in number and essence. Yet the Father is God, and the Son is God. There is one Omnipotent Being. The Father is that Being, and the Son is that Being; they are one Being, and yet they are two distinct Persons. There is one Eternal, Unchangeable Being; yet in that Unchangeable Being there is the Father who from eternity begets the Son, and there is in that same Unchangeable Being the Son, who from eternity is begotten of the Father. Yes, the Father is that Eternal, Unchangeable Being, and likewise the Son is that Eternal, Unchangeable Being. Neither is before the other, nor after the other, neither is greater than the other, nor less than the other. Yet the Father is the First Person, the

Son the Second Person.—These things are beyond our comprehension, and humbly we bow before the divine mystery.

Rather, we turn our attention to what this Triune God — in the present case Father and Son—has done for us. The Father has put all things under the Son’s feet.

This truth is expressed in various ways in the Scriptures. A very common way is that Jesus speaks of the Father as having *sent* Him. “I must work the works of him that *sent me*.” (John 9:4). “I came ... not to do mine own will, but the will of him that *sent me*” (John 6:38).—Jesus is the “servant” of God— Isaiah uses this term. “Behold my *servant*, whom I uphold, mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth” (chap. 42:1). “Behold, my servant shall deal prudently” (chap. 52:13). As servant Jesus said, “The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do” (John 5:19). And Isaiah says, “The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand” (chap. 53:10). Jesus even said, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28), although He also said, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30), and demanded that “all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father” (John 5:23). — The Father put all things under His feet. “All things are delivered unto me of my Father,” Jesus says; therefore, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:27–28). For “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:4–5).

Thus the fact that we cannot understand the Trinity need not disturb us: we see that the Trinity, each Person of the Trinity, is interested in, and is working for our salvation. The Father puts everything under His Son’s feet, or lays everything into His Son’s hands, and the Son willingly undertakes the task, although it cost Him bitter suffering and death.

Now Paul adds that the Father, who put all things under His Son’s feet, is Himself excepted. He was not put under Jesus’ feet. There was no permanent change in the Trinity. The Father did not abdicate, and hand the world over to His Son. He temporarily turned it over to Him for the sole purpose that He should restore it. It was the Father’s world. He had created it. It was to remain His after its restoration. In other words, the Father did not throw away the world, He did not cease to love it. No, He wanted it as His own, so that He might be a true Father to it, as He had planned it from the beginning when He created the world.

Thus Paul, in connection with the resurrection, in discussing certain aspects of it, reminds us of the abiding love of the Father.

A little more about this unfathomable divine mystery in the next verse.



In our resurrection the Holy Trinity is involved. It is the final phase of the work of redemption, which the Father commissioned the Son to do for Him when He put all things under His feet. What will be the situation when the work is completed, when the resurrection has taken place? Paul answers this question in the next verse.

V. 28: “And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.”

Here we have again an expression concerning the unfathomable mystery of the Trinity. The Son, who is equal with the Father in essence, in power, in honor, yes, who is One with the Father, will become subject to the Father.—Who can grasp it? Let us not waste any time in speculating about it. It is too deep for human understanding as well as for human language. Paul wants to impress on our hearts that the work of redemption will then be completed, with no loose ends left to take care of. The original state, and the original relation as it existed between God and man before man’s fall into sin, will have been completely restored. There will be no further need for the services of a Mediator. God Himself will be all in all.

This truth we should diligently ponder, both when our loved ones are taken from us in death, and when we face our own death. After the resurrection God will be all in all. God, as Jesus said to the rich young man, is the only Good One. He is the highest Good and the fountain of all goodness. When He is all in all, then everything will be goodness, sweetness, blessing, exquisite joy and happiness, with no tram of evil, of pain or

sorrow. God is Life, and the source of all life. When God is all in all there will be nothing but life, life abundant. Can we grasp it? John once wrote “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (I John 3:2).

A Difficult Verse

V. 29: “Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?”

This verse has always caused the commentators much worry; even the Greek church fathers, for whom Greek was their mother tongue, did not see their way clear. A very prominent Lutheran theologian, Abraham Calov, who died in 1686, wrote a large commentary on the whole Bible, which he called the “Illustrated Bible.” In discussing our present verse he enumerated 22 different interpretations, remarking that there are almost as many interpretations as there are interpreters. — In venturing to say a few words about this difficult text we humbly pray the Holy Spirit for His guidance.

The difficulty is in the phrase “for the dead.”

About the middle of the second century there lived a certain Gnostic, Marcion, who developed a separate form of this heresy. He found a following, who were called after him the Marcionites. In this sect there later developed the custom that if a catechumen died before he was baptized, they would hide a living person under his deathbed, who would answer the customary questions for the dead person, and then was baptized in his place. — That was making a farce out of the sacrament. It was an innovation among the Marcionites. Hence Paul cannot have such a custom in mind.

If you read the German Bible you will find that Luther has “over” where the English Bible has “for.” “Over” is the literal meaning of the Greek preposition here used. Luther assumed that baptisms were frequently performed over the graves. This assumption seems to be an error. There is an old book, known as the *Didache* (Teachings of the Apostles, re-discovered in 1883) which had a wide circulation in the early Church. It was written, most likely, somewhere between 80 and 120. This book contains the following instructions about the manner of baptism: “Concerning baptism, baptize thus: Having first rehearsed all these things, baptize in *the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost*, in running water, but if thou hast no running water, baptize in other water; and if thou canst not in cold, then in warm. But if thou hast neither, pour water three times on the head in *the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit*.” — The reference to running water and standing pools does not favor the idea of baptizing over graves.

The preposition which Luther translated with *over* and the English Bible with *for*, literally means *over* (above), but it was used in several transferred senses. One was *for the benefit of*, this during New Testament times developed into the meaning of *in the stead of*. The latter is the sense in which many take the *for* in our text. But that would presuppose a practice such as the Marcionites had much later. — Our English *over* also is used in different ways. Think of an expression like: “They prayed over the matter.” Here one could easily substitute *about* for *over* without changing the meaning. The same is true of the Greek. In Rom. 1:8, Paul says: “I thank my God. . . *for* (over) you all.” Here some old manuscripts even have *about* (for over) as a variant reading. What the specific meaning is in a given case must be determined from the connection.

Before we briefly look at the line of thought in our passage we note another little point. Paul says, over *the* dead. If he had special cases in mind like those of the later Marcionites, he would hardly have used the definite article. By saying *the* dead, he takes them as a group, not easily as some individual cases of a special kind.

Now concerning the truths which stand out prominently in Paul’s argument throughout the chapter so far. He stressed the resurrection of Christ and the Corinthians’ faith in this fact. Both, Paul’s preaching and the Corinthians’ faith, would be hollow and fruitless without Christ’s resurrection. But Christ’s resurrection means His victory over our death. It shows that the cause of our death has been removed by the forgiveness of our sins,

and death has lost its power over us. Our resurrection in due time is assured Christ's resurrection was the firstfruits. Without this complete victory over death we believers would be of all men most miserable. — Thus everything turns about death and our delivery from death. All Gospel preaching concerns itself with death, and so does our faith.

Now Paul turns to baptism: "They which are baptized." He adds: "for (over) the dead. " Just as in preaching so also in baptism the attention centers on death. It is a baptism into Christ, and that means into His death. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3). Stronger language may be used. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death" (v. 4). Baptism is a washing of regeneration, we are born again by water and the Spirit (John 3:5). "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.... Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:4, 11).

Yes baptism, just like preaching, concerns the dead. In the Sacrament of Baptism the forgiveness of sins which is announced to us in the Gospel is sealed to us by the application of water in the name of the Triune God. Just as we hear the Gospel, to be assured of Christ's victory over death, so we accept baptism as a seal of that victory for us. That is the meaning of baptism. It is a baptism for the dead.

But then, why should anyone seek baptism if dead people do not rise at all? What then shall they do, that is, what benefit will they achieve from their baptism, if there is no resurrection of the dead? Why then submit to baptism? It would be a meaningless ceremony.

In Adam all die, and baptism is a sacrament for the dead. It unites them with Christ, the firstfruits of the resurrection.

In the following Paul will repeat his reference to the dead by citing his own example, how he faced death every day.



Baptism is a "Baptism for the dead." It concerns death and our rescue from death. It is a baptism into Christ, If Christ has any meaning for us, it is in connection with death. If man had not become subject to death by his sin, Christ would not have come into the world. He came and died for us. Our baptism into Christ is a baptism into His death. By baptism into Christ we are united with His death, His death is credited to us. But Christ arose victorious from the grave. If we are partakers of His death, then when we die we cannot remain dead forever. Christ's death was only a temporary condition. If we are united with His death, then also our death must be transitory. If we have died with Him, it follows that we shall also live with Him. Our baptism into His death is a baptism also into His resurrection.

As a fruit of such baptism Christians are ever ready and willing to lay down their life in witness of their faith. Not that they are callous over against death. Death is a terrible thing, it is the king of all terrors. It is a most unnatural thing. Although Christ has redeemed us from death, there remains, also in Christians, an aversion to the thought of death, even a fear of death. But through faith in Christ Christians overcome this natural dread. Their confidence rests on the hope which the victory of Christ gives them,

Though the night of death be fraught
Still with many an anxious thought.

Facing Death

In the midst of earthly life
Snares of death surround us.

Paul was exposed to death in a special degree. He was a preacher of the Gospel, foolishness to the Greeks, and to the Jews a stumbling block. In trying to silence his preaching his enemies stopped short of nothing. They were ever ready to lay hands on his life. He speaks about this in the following verses.

V. 30–31: “And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.”

These words are clear in themselves and really do not call for any detailed discussion. The expression “your rejoicing” is subject to misunderstanding. It does not mean the rejoicing which the Corinthians do, but the rejoicing which Paul does concerning the Corinthians. He brought them the Gospel of Christ Jesus our Lord. They accepted it, and now Paul is rejoicing in this fact and is boasting about the faith of the Corinthians. This joy over the faith of the Corinthians which their Savior Jesus Christ worked in their hearts supports Paul strongly in his readiness to lay down his life.

He used two expressions about his relation to death. First he says that he and his co-workers stand in danger every hour, that is, all the time. Paul could say this on the basis of his experience. Practically in every city in which he preached the Gospel he was persecuted and threatened with death. Sometimes he was cruelly beaten and cast into prison. Once he was even stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead. So he could well say, We face the danger of death at all times.

He uses a second expression: “I die daily.” He does not mean that he daily stands in danger of being killed, he means more. Because of that ever present danger of death, and because he daily keeps himself ready for death, he practically every day suffers in his heart the agony of dying.

Why should he do that? It would be the most foolish thing he could do if there were no resurrection. But if there is a resurrection, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ together with our baptism gives us the assurance that it will be a resurrection unto life eternal, a resurrection into the kingdom which Jesus restored for the Father and will deliver to Him on the last day: then why not face death boldly? Death is a defeated foe, and will have to relinquish us again at Jesus’ bidding.

In the following verse Paul becomes more specific.

V. 32: “If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? “

In the Book of Daniel we read that the Prophet was cast into the den of lions because he refused to obey the king’s decree that for a period of thirty days no man should ask any petition of any god or man except of the king himself. In spite of this order Daniel had kept up his custom of kneeling before God three times a day (chap. 6).

Casting criminals before hungry or infuriated wild beasts was a mode of execution. During the Roman period this mode was used on slaves and prisoners of war. During the early years of the Church many Christians were martyred in this way. But the Romans added a new feature. In Daniel’s case no one stayed at the den to watch what would happen. In Roman days such executions were carried out in the arena for the amusement of the people. To prolong the show the victims were given some little weapons with which to defend themselves. This form of entertainment became so popular that some men made a profession of fighting with wild animals. Of course, they entered the arena better armed than were the criminals or prisoners of war.

This is the matter to which Paul refers.

The question is, did Paul actually fight with wild beasts in the arena at Ephesus? Or is he speaking figuratively about the dangers to which he was exposed in his Gospel work?

It is difficult to decide the matter. On the one hand, Paul certainly was not a professional *bestiarius*, as such men were called. Furthermore, he was a Roman citizen, and it was illegal to execute a Roman citizen by casting him before the lions. In 2 Cor. 11:23–27, we read a long list of Paul’s trials and perils, but a fight with wild beasts is not mentioned. — It was illegal to cast a Roman citizen to the lions: but so it was also illegal to scourge a Roman citizen without a hearing. Yet just that happened to Paul in Philippi (Acts 16:22–23). So it is possible, though not very probable, that some over-zealous Roman officer rashly cast Paul to the lions.

Some think that Paul is referring to the riot of Demetrius. Paul's life certainly was in danger during that riot. The Christians in Ephesus would not let him go to the theater, where the meeting was held, and even some heathen friends of his sent warnings to him to stay away from the theater. But the riot of Demetrius took place *after* Paul had written his First Epistle to the Corinthians. Hence he cannot here be referring to it. It had not yet happened.

Paul faced many and grave dangers during his stay in Ephesus. When he met the Ephesian elders about a year after he had written our chapter, he mentioned the "many tears, temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews" (Acts 20:19). In his Second Letter to the Corinthians he says that "we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: but we had the sentence of death in ourselves" (chap. 1:8–9). But nowhere is there a note in the records that Paul was imprisoned to fight with wild beasts in the arena. We cannot answer the question what it was specifically that befell Paul; but so much is clear that his very life was endangered.

Now Paul asks the question, what would be the sense of risking his life just for the sake of preaching the Gospel— if there is no resurrection. What would be the advantage for him? and what for those to whom he preached?

But since there is a resurrection unto life, even the risk of a violent death is not too great a price.



In order to get a clearer picture of the background of the few verses which we studied recently, many remarks on the customs of Paul's day were necessary. At times this may have been a little tiring, since it hampered a more rapid progress.— There are now about two and a half verses left of the first part of Paul's discussion of our Christian hope for a resurrection unto life. The words are easier, but in order to feel the full force of one remark a little digression into the history of Greek philosophy will be helpful.

V. 32: "If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die. "

The first part of this verse about Paul's fighting with wild beasts we investigated in our last study. There remains the remark about eating and drinking. These words are plain enough in themselves; yet there is a story behind them.

About the year 300 B.C. there lived a philosopher in Athens by the name of Epicurus (born 342, died 271 B.C.). We need not now enter into a lengthy discussion of his views on physics. Let it suffice to state that he was a materialist, and thought that also the human soul was made up of little particles of matter, a sort of refined gas. In death this gas dissipates, and that is the end.

Since we live only once, Epicurus said, it must be our aim and chief endeavor to make this life as pleasant as possible. The world being, as he thought, the result of an accidental meeting and combination of the various atoms, it is natural to expect that not everything will be good and beneficial. In our life we must expect both pain and pleasure. Therefore we should try to regulate our own life in such a way that the result will be a maximum of pleasure coupled with a minimum of pain.

To achieve this purpose he counseled moderation. Never indulge in any pleasure to excess. He himself was very moderate, even austere, in his personal habits. He did this, not because he considered it morally wrong to overdo pleasures, but because he wanted to safeguard his health, and to avoid dulling his senses by excess, but rather to keep them keen so that he might all the more enjoy the next gratification of his desires.

His sole aim in life was satisfaction and pleasure.

What effect will a philosophy like this have on the habits of the people? This is not difficult to imagine. If the sole purpose for which we live is to have pleasure, then let us go all-out for pleasure. People may well realize that when pleasures are indulged in to excess they themselves will suffer harm in health and in character. But that knowledge will not provide them with sufficient strength to curb and contain the cravings of their senses. They will say, Who knows how long I may still enjoy this life? So, as long as I have it, so long I will enjoy it to the fullest extent.

This is exactly what happened to the philosophy of Epicurus. The people made the application exactly as Paul phrases it in our text: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. “

The Christians abhorred this way of thinking and talking and living. But Paul says that, if there is no resurrection, then those Epicureans are right, the Epicurean philosophy is the only one that makes sense. The Corinthians could not challenge that conclusion; and they were horrified when they realized to what depths their denial of the resurrection would lead them.

Not all Corinthians denied the resurrection. Some clung fast to their Christian hope. But some were troubled by doubts. They did not with indignation reject the doubts and turn their back on them, no, they toyed with the idea. That was a dangerous thing. Therefore Paul tries to fill their hearts with disgust by pointing to the nauseating effects which the doubting of the resurrection will have on men’s lives and morals.

He underscores this warning in the following verse by quoting a common proverb. It is a proverb which everybody can readily understand, and which was also used by several Greek poets in their writings.

V. 33: “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.”

In the following verse Paul concludes this part of his great chapter on the Christian hope of resurrection.

V. 34: “Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge edge of God: I speak this to your shame.”

Our English translation here loses much of the forcefulness of Paul’s words. The word which is translated as “awake” really means “sober up” from drunkenness. The condition of the Corinthians was far worse than sleep, it was a case of senseless drunkenness. They were drunk with their doubts about the resurrection. It is bad enough when a person who should be wide awake falls asleep on his job; it is a hundred times worse if he gets drunk.

The doubters maintained that the Christians could not see straight when they accepted the hope of their resurrection; if they were sober they would not be so gullible. Paul returns the charge and reverses the matter: The Christians are not drunk when accepting the hope of their resurrection, rather, the doubters are the drunk ones with their denial.

The Christians are very sober. Soberly they look at the cause of death, namely sin. Soberly they accept the Gospel of God that Jesus by His death atoned for our sins, and completely wiped out our enormous debt. Soberly they accept God’s promise that, since our sin has been forgiven, death has no longer any power over us, and will in due time be forced to release us from the grave. Drunk are those who question the resurrection. They sin, and completely miss the mark.

“For some have not the knowledge of God.” So our English Bible continues. But Paul’s words are much sharper: They have (and are afflicted with) gross ignorance of God.

When the Sadducees tried to prove to Jesus that there can be no resurrection, because a resurrection would lead to great confusion in all family relations, particularly in marriages, Jesus answered them: “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, *nor the power of God*” (Matt 22:29). In other words, Jesus charged them with gross ignorance about God. This is an ignorance which even natural reason should be able to overcome. If there is a God who created heaven and earth out of nothing, is it then a greater and more difficult thing to bring a dead person back to life? When Paul in his speech before King Agrippa and Governor Festus touched on the resurrection he directed this pointed question to the Gentiles that were present: “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” (Acts 26:8).

Hence the fact that the Corinthians were troubled by doubts concerning the resurrection should make them blush. “I speak to your shame.” — So Paul concludes the argument

In the next part, the second half of the chapter, he takes up the question: How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?”



Paul opens the second part of his resurrection chapter by quoting the question: “How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?”

These questions were really meant as an objection, they were intended to ridicule the hope of resurrection. They were injected by the doubters of the resurrection, in order to shake the faith of the believers. The doubters meant to say: Oh yes, people may talk very glibly about a resurrection and the certainty of the resurrection; but it takes only a simple little question to puncture their entire elaborate argument, and to blast their fantastic hope completely. Just how will the resurrection take place? More specifically: With what body will the dead people come forth from their burying places? The body is lowered into the ground, where it decomposes, and after only a short time nothing but a few bones may be found of it And these also will disappear eventually. Or the dead body was burned on the pyre, so that only a handful of ashes remains. This may be preserved in an urn for some time, or may even at once be scattered to the winds.—Now tell me, how will the dead be raised? and with what body will they come forth?

The idea underlying this question is that, if a resurrection is to be possible at all, then at least a substantial part of the old body must be preserved. Look at the elaborate manner which the Egyptians employed in turning the corpses of their departed ones into mummies. And think of the huge pyramids which some of their mighty kings erected to preserve their mummified bodies toward an expected return. Thus a few favored ones thought that they could secure a resurrection for themselves while the common hordes of people, who could afford neither pyramid nor even embalming, were left without a chance.—With what body will they come forth?

There was another idea behind this question. If a resurrection will take place, it will be a return to this life, or at least to a life very similar to the one which we are living now on earth. It will be a life spent in eating and drinking, digesting and eliminating, working and sleeping, marrying and keeping house. The resurrection bodies will be, just as now, constituted for such a life, and will be in need of such a life. — With what body will they come forth?

Glorified Bodies

Paul meets the objection in the following verse.

V. 36: “Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die.”

The first “thou” is not in the Greek original, as is indicated by the italics in our English Bible. The second “thou” is there very emphatically. Paul’s words thus read something like this: “Fool! what you yourself sow,” etc.

Paul wants to say, You are a smart aleck. With your question you try to make out the Christians to be fools because they hope for a resurrection, and you yourself do not realize how foolish you are. You sow your seeds regularly, don’t you? When you throw your seed into the ground, don’t you know that you will never see it again? It will die and decay. —But there you do not stand wailing, How will it be raised? With what body will it come forth? You know that your seed is not wasted. In due time it will sprout and come forth. In fact, if the seed did not die and decay, then it would be waged. In your seed death and life hang inseparably together. This you observe every year. Why don’t you take the lesson to heart?

Now Paul makes this foolish question the starting point for some further instruction about our resurrection.

V. 37: “And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain.” Paul stresses two points in the analogy of the seed: on the one hand, the sameness in nature of the seed and the plant, and on the other, the difference in appearance. If you sow a kernel of wheat, the stalk coming forth will be one of wheat, and nothing else. A kernel of wheat will never come forth as rice, or cotton, or what have you. On the other hand, there is a great difference in the appearance. What you cast into the ground is a “bare grain,” nothing but a grain, but what comes forth is a living, luscious plant.

These are the two points which Paul wants us to keep in mind. The body which we bury will not be changed into something else. It will not be replaced by a different person in the resurrection, but will remain the

identical person that died and was buried, and decayed in the grave.—On the other hand, that same body will be completely reorganized.

It is God who does all this.

V. 38: “But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.”

In the creation of the world God fixed sharp boundaries between all the different kinds of plants. He said: “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit, after its kind.” This rule, which God laid down at the beginning, He has kept in force to the present day. To this day a kernel of wheat will produce a stalk of wheat, and a kernel of maize a stalk of maize. God is doing this. He is preserving the world according to this law, which He laid down in the beginning. So it has pleased Him. It is a wonderful law. The climatic conditions and the condition of the soil vary greatly in different countries. This difference will have an influence on the development of plant life, making it more luxuriant in one case, while runting it in another. But it will never change the kind of a plant. Wheat remains wheat under all conditions. So it has pleased God. — And shall this God not be able to preserve the identity of a dead body?

But why the change in form, about which Paul speaks? He illustrates this by introducing another analogy, taken from the animal kingdom.

V. 39: “All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds.”

The truth which Paul wishes to impress on our hearts and minds with this analogy of the different kinds of flesh may perhaps most readily be seen if we compare the last two kinds of flesh that he mentions, the flesh of fishes and the flesh of birds.

The fish are so built that they can live only in water, while the birds can live only in the air. Take a fish out of the water, and it dies; force a bird to stay under water, and it will drown. That is the way God created them.

Apply this to the resurrection body. Our bodies are now so constituted that they fit into the form of life here on earth. But after the resurrection there will be a new heaven and a new earth. What life will be like in those surroundings we have no way of knowing now. Only so much we can say that our bodies as now constituted are not adapted to that mode of living. Paul was once raised into heaven; but things were so different there, he could not even tell whether he was in the body or out of the body. He heard wonderful sounds in heaven, but he was unable to reproduce them with his present organs of speech.

By creating the various forms of life here on earth God gave us an example of the great variety of forms which He is able to produce. Our bodies as they are now constituted could not exist in the heavenly environment; but in the resurrection though they will be the identical bodies which we have now, God will so transform them that they will fit into our new home.

Does this prospect stagger our imagination? In the following verse Paul will adduce another comparison—which, however, we must reserve for our Christmas study.



The issue of *The Northwestern Lutheran* for which these lines are written bears the date of December 25. That is the festival of Christmas, of the birth of our Savior. The Son of God came down from heaven to join our human race, yes, to become a member of the human family by assuming a complete human nature, a human body like ours and a human soul like ours, being born of the Virgin Mary, yet without sin.

This is the same Son of God who will come down from heaven a second time on the last day, at the end of the world, to raise the dead. On that day He will return to complete the work, to put the finishing touches on the work which to perform He was born at Christmas. Then He will return in glory to give the final proof that all things have been put under His feet — even death, whose power at present still seems to be unbroken, who seemingly takes people out of this life as he wills: he slays young and old, rich and poor, men of prominence and men of humble estate, the strong and robust as well as the weak and sickly. Nobody can escape his arbitrary

rule. But it only seems as though his rule were unbroken. On the last day Jesus will force him to release all his victims. Jesus will raise them from the dead.

When Jesus came into the world as a member of the human race, His appearance did not create the impression that He would achieve the great things which He did. He came as a weak and helpless little child. He needed swaddling clothes for the protection of His body, a manger to sleep. He needed food for nourishment, and the general care of His mother and the protection of His foster father. — Besides, He was born in great poverty.

As He grew up and entered upon His public career He still continued in His state of humiliation. To be sure, there were occasional, yes, quite numerous flashes of His divine glory, when He performed miracles of many kinds, raising even the dead; and when by His powerful preaching He filled the despairing sinners' hearts with new hope, with peace and sabbatical rest. Yet He continued in weakness, and although He had healed many sick people and recalled some from their deathbed, from the bier, from the grave, yet He went to the cross, and His enemies jeered: "He saved others, himself he cannot save."

He died and was laid in the grave, and nobody suspected that He was the One who at the end of the world would return to open all graves and force death to release all his victims.

When at Christmas we look at our newborn Savior, let us remember this. Let us look behind the veil of His weak flesh and behold in Him the Conqueror of death and hell.

We now return to our study of St. Paul's great chapter on the resurrection. In the section at which we have arrived Paul speaks about celestial bodies, about the sun, the moon, and stars. We recall that in the prophecies of the Old Testament Jesus is called the Star out of Jacob; and when He was born in Bethlehem God announced His birth to the Wise Men of the East by means of a special star. Paul is not speaking about this in our chapter, but he uses the heavenly bodies to illustrate a truth concerning the resurrection.

Who of us has not already on some clear night stood gazing at the sky over his head in rapt amazement? The heavens were studded with stars. Whether we turned to the east or to the west, to the north, or to the south, or looked straight up above our heads, it was always the same, thousands upon thousands of stars everywhere. If we waited long enough we may have seen a star suddenly flashing up, traveling some distance, only to disappear just as suddenly as it had come. If we looked more closely we began to realize that of the myriads of stars not two are exactly alike in brilliance. Some give off a very bright light, while others are pale and sometimes barely visible.

There is an indescribable, fascinating beauty, no monotony.

This rich display of beauty in the firmament Paul uses to illustrate what will happen to us, to our bodies, on resurrection day.

V. 40.41: "There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory."

In the previous section Paul pointed out that the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air, and the fish have differently built bodies, thus adapting them to the surroundings in which they live; and so also, he pointed out, our bodies are to undergo a change in the resurrection, to adapt them to the form of life in the new heavens and on the new earth. Now in v. 40 he calls attention to the differences in glory. Yes, there is beauty on earth. Think of the beautiful flowers, and shrubs, and trees; of the beautiful fields, of the plains, of the forests, of the awesome mountains, and valleys. Think of the many birds and animals. But there is an altogether different beauty in the firmament. Our God created them all, showing us that His wisdom and skill know no bounds. He filled the present universe with unspeakable beauty and glory. We do not know what glory and beauty He has reserved for the world to come.

This applies also to our bodies. The human body is wonderfully made, and is a thing of exquisite beauty. It will be much more so after the resurrection. "How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" Paul calls a man who, because he does not know the answer to this question, doubts the certainty of the resurrection — a fool. Let us not act like fools. In the creation and arrangement of this present world God has

shown us His great wisdom and goodness. His goodness, His wisdom and power, were by far not exhausted in making this world. This world with all its varied beauty is merely a sample of what God is able to do. Let us then consider this present world with admiration and gratitude, in order to whet our anticipation of things to come.

Our thoughts return to the festival which we are celebrating with great joy at this time of the year. In Bethlehem God performed a miracle which is way beyond the reach of our mind: the infinite deity united itself in personal union with a limited and weak human nature. The Creator of all things lies in the manger as a helpless babe, who needs the tender care and nourishment from His mother. Let us not question this miracle; let us rather rejoice that God performed it. It not only shows us that God can do far greater and far more things than we can imagine, no, this Christmas miracle is the first step of His in redeeming us from the power of death, and in preparing the miracle of our resurrection unto life eternal.



In speaking about the manner of the resurrection and the shape in which the dead bodies will be restored Paul so far stressed two points: although it is exactly the same body which was buried that will then come forth, yet the new heavenly environment will make a new constitution necessary; and as there are different degrees of glory in earthly and heavenly bodies, so will also our changed resurrection bodies present differences in their exquisite new glory.

Therefore Paul continues:

V. 42–43: “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.”

With the word “sown” Paul takes up the figure again which he had used in vv. 36 and 37. Three times he now says, “It is sown.” About this sowing he says that it is done with something that is wrapped up in “corruption,” in “dishonor,” in “weakness.” He is not referring to the dead body only as it is at the time of burial: he is thinking of our bodies as we have them all the time, even before we die. They are fragile, subject to decay, without glory. In the resurrection all this will be changed into its very opposite.

In the first half of the following verse Paul sums it up in one word, and at the same time introduces the unfolding of the glorious truth which he will present in the next section.

v.44a: “It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.”

To make a long story short, he says, what we are carrying about in this life, and what we bury in the grave, is just a natural body. It is a body very much like that of the animals. There is life in it, but that is animal life. In the resurrection this will be changed. The body that will come forth out of the grave will be spiritual in its nature. It will still be a real body, but it will have spiritual characteristics. That will be the power, the glory which he had mentioned before.

The next few verses will have to be taken as a unit, to avoid the necessity of constant repetition.

V. 44b–49: “(If) there is a natural body, and there is (also) a spiritual body.—And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.—Howbeit that was not first which was spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual. — The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.—As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. — And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”

In the beginning of this section I inserted an “If,” which is contained in some of the better manuscripts. Paul does not thereby wish to make the matter doubtful, rather, he tries to reassure our faith. He says, If there is a natural body (as you all know there is), then that very fact is an indication that there is also a spiritual body.

For the first part of this argument Paul quotes a direct statement from the Old Testament, from the creation story itself— “And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul.” When God created man He formed a body out of the dust of the ground. Then He breathed into its nostrils the breath of life. It was

still clay, but not dead clay. There was life in it, a life higher than that of the plants, and higher also than that of the animals. It was personal life. Adam was a living soul.

Then what happened? In spite of God's warning Adam sinned and forfeited his life. He introduced death into the world for himself and for all his descendants. But God at once announced His plan that in due time He would restore what Adam had lost. He spoke of the Seed of the woman, His Servant, of whom Isaiah prophesied that after His death He should "prolong his days" and carry out the "pleasure of the Lord" and "divide the spoil" so that "with his stripes we are healed." All of the promises concerning the future Savior Paul sums up in the word: "the last Adam was made a quickening (that is, a life-giving) spirit."

In this section Paul twice refers to the first man or first Adam, and twice he refers to the "second man" or the "last Adam." With the word "second" he indicates the order of sequence, and with the word "last" he emphasizes the fact that there is salvation in none other. This is the "last chance." If we neglect this opportunity, no further chance will be given to us.

With this reference to the first and second Adam Paul takes up the thought again which he had stated in vv. 21 and 22: "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." In those verses he was speaking of the certainty of our resurrection, while in our present text he is dealing with the question: "How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" His answer is: Just as we inherited a natural body from Adam, so Christ has procured for us a spiritual body.

There is a difference. The first Adam was himself a creature, he was earthy. The second Adam is indeed a true man, but He is much more. He is not earthy, He is from heaven, yes, He is the Lord from heaven. What unspeakable glory, then, that as we have borne the image of the earthy, so we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

Christ's resurrection body truly was a spiritual body. It was still a body. It could be seen and touched; it could walk and talk and eat; it still showed the nail prints and the gash from the spear: but it possessed spirituality, it passed through bolted doors, it appeared and vanished at will. In our resurrection we shall bear His image. He will change our vile body that it may be like unto His glorious body.

By holding this wonderful prospect before our eyes Paul encourages us to bear our present weaknesses patiently and to face our death cheerfully. Resurrection day is coming, which will bring with it this glorious change. Then will our mouth be filled with laughter and our tongue with singing.

Paul has a little more to say on the question with what body we shall come forth from the grave. We defer a discussion to our next study.



The doubters of the resurrection tried to ridicule the hope of a resurrection by asking the question: "How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" Paul answers the question by pointing out that through the power of God, which is unlimited, the very same body which we bury in the grave will come forth, but that this body in the process will undergo a great change, in order to adapt it to the form of life in the new heaven and on the new earth. After unfolding this answer in the verses 36–49 he briefly sums up his argument in the next verse.

V. 50: "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption."

Flesh and blood, that is, our bodies as they are now constituted, are not fit for the glorious life in the kingdom of heaven. That life does not fall to them in the way of endowment, an "inheritance," or as a natural continuation of their present life. They will have to undergo a thorough change. Corruption does not naturally develop into incorruption. A creative act of God is required. God performs this work by allowing our bodies to decompose in the grave, and then calling them back into a new life.

But this poses another question: What about those people who will be still alive when the resurrection day dawns? Paul answers this question in the following.

The Survivors on Resurrection Day

V. 51: “Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.”

What Paul had said about the changes in our resurrection bodies certainly was a mystery. The wise men in old Egypt, as we have seen, knew nothing about it. The builders of the pyramids possessed exceptional wisdom. People who investigate those colossal tombs and the intricacies of their interior arrangement marvel at the skill and scientific knowledge that went into their construction. Yet those intellectual giants of old did not know that in the resurrection a great change will take place in the human body. They considered a resurrection possible only if the dead body were preserved. Thus they had only a very crude conception of a resurrection. We know about the change only because God has revealed it to us. It is a mystery.

It is a mystery not only in the sense that we did not know anything about it, and had no way of finding out about it except through a revelation from God: it is a mystery also in this sense that we cannot understand it even after God has revealed it to us. Who, for instance, can grasp what a “spiritual body” may be like, even after Paul mentioned just this in his previous remarks? It remains a mystery which we accept in faith and about which we rejoice in hope. Paul wants his readers to accept it in that spirit. Behold, it is a mystery which I am telling you and about which I am making some explanations. Accept it as a mystery. Do not ask any curious questions, else you might lose this precious revelation.

This mystery covers more than he has mentioned so far. So far he spoke about people who had died already, now he turns to those who were still living, not particularly those living at the time that he wrote his epistle, but all those who would be living on the coming resurrection day. He says that not all people will die, some will survive till the end. When the present writer was a small boy he had the crude idea that before Judgment Day all people on earth would die, and only after the last person had died would that great day be ushered in. No, Paul says, not all of us will die. To be sure, all those that lived in Paul’s day have died long ago, and many generations after them. Also many of those living today must still die, yes, all may die — because we simply do not know when the Last Day will be. But not all people will die, there will be some living at that time. Yet whether living or dead “we shall all be changed.”

How long will that process of changing go on? How much time will it require? Will there be a chance for a last minute conversion for such as neglected to prepare for Christ’s return? Paul answers:

V. 52a: “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump.”

Jesus Himself foretold that He would send His angels “with a great sound of a trumpet” (Matt. 24:31), and Paul in an earlier letter of his had mentioned “the trump of God” (I Thess. 4:16). So now he simply says, “at the last trump.” All people, both living and dead, will hear that trumpet at one and the same moment, and with that trumpet blast the present world time will be at an end. The resurrection of the dead and their transformation, and the change of the living will be accomplished at the same time. It will take place “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.”

The point which Paul stresses is the change.

V. 52b: “For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

This change is a necessity. The “must” of the next verse is very emphatic in the Greek text. This is God’s arrangement, and no enemy can stop Him. So it must be, and so it will be.

V. 53: “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

Paul began this great chapter with a reference to the Gospel of salvation. Our resurrection from the dead is a part of the redemptive work of our Savior. The last official act which our Savior will perform will be the resurrection of His believers and their separation from the unbelievers. Then He will turn over the restored kingdom to His Father. — In the second part of the chapter, where Paul speaks about the manner of the resurrection and the change which our body, whether living or dead at Christ’s return, must undergo, he finishes in a similar way.

V. 54: “So when(ever) this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory.”

Then we can sing in triumph:

V. 55: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

Remembering the fact of which Paul reminds us in the next verse (56) that “the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law,” we will remain humble, thanking God that He saved us by the sacrifice of His own Son (v. 57): “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And we will take to heart the admonition with which Paul closes the chapter v. 58): “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”



Since June 26, 1955, we have been studying St. Paul’s great chapter on the Christians’ hope of resurrection. In his instruction of the Corinthian Christians he does not say anything about the unbelievers. What will happen to them on the last day? Paul limits himself to a Christian’s hope. For our warning other Scripture passages tell us about the unbelievers. There are also other points regarding the resurrection that are briefly touched in other Scripture passages. We shall now mention some, but it will not be necessary to deal with them at length.

“Resurrection of the Body”

What is it that will be restored in the resurrection? In the chapter which we studied Paul simply spoke of the resurrection of “the dead.” See verses 12, 13, 15, 16. Just as it is said of the persons that they die, so it is also the persons that will be restored in the resurrection. Job emphatically said, “I myself...and not another” (chap. 19:27). Jesus also mentioned simply “the dead” as the ones to be raised. “For as the Father raiseth up *the dead*, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will” (John 5:21). To Martha He said about Lazarus: “*Thy brother shall rise again*” (John 11:23).

Scripture often compares death to a sleep. When we awake from sleep we feel refreshed, filled with new vigor and ambition. We feel like “new persons” but in essence we are the same persons that we were before we fell asleep, with the same knowledge and skills that we had before. We recognize our friends, and in turn, we are not strangers to them. There we have a faint picture of what will happen in the resurrection. For a concrete example took at the risen Christ: so very different, and yet the same.

Why then does our Creed mention only the body? We referred to the Egyptian pyramids, which the mighty kings built in order to preserve their bodies for a resurrection. Heathen persecutors of the Christians frequently burned the bodies of the martyrs to ashes and scattered these to the winds: “Now we will see that there is nothing to their hope of a resurrection. “

The bodies are specifically mentioned in Scripture. Paul told the Romans that God who raised up Christ “shall also quicken your *mortal bodies*” (chap. 8:11). He assured the Philippians that Christ would “change our *vile body*, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (chap. 3:21).

They will be wonderful bodies: “spiritual” (I Cor. 15:44), not subject to hunger, thirst, or heat (Rev. 7:16), nor to pain in general (Rev. 21:4), “incorruptible” (I Cor. 15:42), in “glory” (I Cor. 15:43), vigorous and full of “power” (I Cor. 15:43).

Unbelievers

Yes, the unbelievers will also be brought back to life, but theirs will not be the “resurrection unto life.” Daniel writes that the great number of “them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (chap. 12:2). Jesus’ word is emphatic: “The hour is coming,

in the which *all* that are in the graves shall bear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28–29). Before the governor Felix Paul pointed to his hope of resurrection, because of which he always exercised himself to keep his conscience “void of offense.” He said “that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust” (Acts 24:15).

The resurrection which awaits the unbeliever will thus not be the same as that of the believer, it will not be a resurrection unto life everlasting. It will be a resurrection unto judgment and damnation. In our Second Article we confess that Jesus, who ascended into heaven and is now sitting at the right hand of the Father, will return to “judge the quick and the dead.” Before His judgment seat all men will have to appear, also the unbelievers, to receive the due reward of their evil deeds. For that purpose they will be called back from the graves. They will not want to come back to life, but they will have to, they will have to face Him as their Judge whom in life on earth they scorned as their Savior, and whose precious blood they trampled under foot by their unbelief. They will wail and shriek, pleading with the mountains to fall on them and with the hills to cover them (Luke 23:30), but to no avail. They must arise and face their Judge.

The bodies of the believers will be glorified in their resurrection. Also the bodies of the unbelievers will undergo a change, but in the opposite direction. Daniel says that they will awake “to shame and everlasting contempt” (chap. 12:2). Isaiah uses even stronger terms in the very last verse of his book. He speaks about the “carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me (the Lord): for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh” (chap. 66:24).

Human Curiosity

We should think that the announcement of the Scriptures concerning a coming resurrection would have, on the one hand, a very sobering effect, on the other, a very cheering one. Paul said to Felix that because of the hope of a resurrection he exercised himself to “have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men” (Acts 24:16). And to the Thessalonians he wrote that they should “comfort one another with these words” with regard to the death of their loved ones, and should “edify one another” (I Thess. 4:18; 5:11). We should think that every one would accept the admonition of Jesus: “Take heed to yourselves... Watch ye therefore and pray always that ye may be accounted worthy ... to stand before the Son of man” (Luke 21:34–36).

Instead of that many people ask improper questions. The Corinthians asked in order to cast doubts on the resurrection, this question: “*How* will the dead be raised up? and *with what bodies* do they come?” Some Christians ask similar questions out of curiosity. They ask, for instance, of what approximate age people will be at their resurrection. They say, Many people die as infants, will they also be infants in their resurrection? Others die as feeble hoary-haired old people, will they also arise as such? Some then answer, Yes; while others say, No, it will be better if they all were like people about 30 years old. But the Scriptures do not say anything about this matter, and where God does not speak we should muzzle our curiosity, and listen attentively to what He does say. Let us thank God for His promise of a glorious resurrection—and leave the details to Him.

Others wonder if the difference of the sexes will be continued in the world to come, or if we shall all be sexless. Again, the Scriptures do not speak about this point.

Jesus, indeed, does tell us that after the resurrection they will neither marry nor be given in marriage (Matt. 22:30). There will be no family life in heaven with father and mother, and brothers and sisters. And He adds: “Neither can they die anymore” (Luke 20:36).

Yes, then Jesus will have completely finished His work when death has thus been swallowed up in victory.



JUDGMENT

Resurrection of the body, which human reason finds difficult to believe, is a very definite doctrine of the Scriptures. The resurrection, however, is not really an end in itself God does not raise the dead merely for the purpose of bringing them back to the life from which they departed the moment they died. Resurrection is a transitory event. It is preparatory for judgment. AD the dead will be called back to life for the purpose that they may appear before the final judgment of God. Dead people cannot be judged. You may pronounce a verdict about them, but you cannot hail them before court for a trial. All people, however, will be judged, and for that purpose all the dead will be raised.

The Certainty of Judgment

In our Second Article we confess that Christ will return to judge the quick and the dead. Do the Scriptures teach such a final judgment? They certainly do, and in several different ways. We shall now look at a few passages.

Matt. 10:15: “Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city” — any city which refuses to receive the messengers of Christ.— Note how plainly Jesus speaks about a “day of judgment” and how He points out a difference of degree in the sentence that will then be pronounced over various cities. — The same is found also in the following passage:

Matt. 11:23 24: “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the *day of judgment*, than for thee.”

In many other passages the Scriptures speak about the coming judgment in a matter-of-fact way. We just list a few expressions. If God were unrighteous, Paul asks, “then how shall God judge the world?” (Rom. 3:6 “Them that are without, God judgeth” (I Cor. 5:13).

We have a very graphic description of the judgment in Rev. 20:12–13: “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.”

Scripture makes use of the fact of a coming judgment for purposes of exhortation in various ways. Jesus for instance, urges people to hear and accept His Word, because His Word will assure us of acquittal in that final judgment. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24). When we are tempted with negligence in hearing the Word of God, will not a promise of this kind stir up our sluggish hearts, and make us eager to hear?

In Athens Paul used a reference to the final judgment in his call to repentance, to show how urgent his call is: “God now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained” (Acts 17:30–31). — Judgment looms as an unquestioned fact: now prepare for it.

Since judgment day is an assured reality, and God has reserved the right of judgment to Himself, we must refrain from usurping His authority. We would thereby make ourselves liable on that great day. “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts” (I Cor. 4:5).

If we realize that we shall have to appear before the supreme judge at the end of the world to give an account of our conduct, will this thought not help to stimulate us to be most careful in living according to the will of the Lord? “Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we

must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:9–10).

In comparison with this tremendous fact that we must appear for judgment before Christ Himself, the other matter “whether present or absent,” whether living or dead is very insignificant.

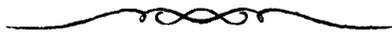
In the fact that the Judge is at the door we find encouragement to be faithful to the end. “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Rev. 3:11).

Just as the Scriptures use the judgment for purposes of encouragement they also use it *for warning*. Listen to the following.

Matt. 12:33–37: “Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.” In the next verse Jesus applies this evident truth to the speech of people: “O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart (out of the thoughts and lusts with which the heart is filled) the mouth speaketh (and thus a man’s speech reveals what is in his heart). A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.” Then Jesus adds the warning: “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the *day of judgment*. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

John 5:29: Jesus warns that they who have done evil will come forth “unto the *resurrection of damnation*.” — In John 12:47–48, He warns the Jews (and us) not to neglect His word, for “the word that I have spoken, the same *shall judge him in the last day*. In Rom. 2:5, Paul warns us that they who despise the riches of God’s goodness treasure up for themselves “wrath against the *day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God*” (See also Heb. 10:27 and Jas. 5:9.)

Paul, who earnestly warns us to be careful in our conduct because of the coming judgment, himself took that warning seriously to heart. Before the court of Governor Felix he referred to the resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust; then he continued: “And herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men” (Acts 24:16). Yes, there is going to be a final judgment.



Natural reason may not relish the idea of a final judgment, men may prefer to think that death ends it all; yet, as we saw in our previous study, Scripture not only very emphatically teaches that there is going to be a day of judgment, whether men like it or not, but also makes use of that fact for warning and encouragement. The certainty of the judgment is apparent also from the various names which the Scriptures use for the time of that great event. We shall list a few passages.

Time of the Judgment

There are a number of passages which speak specifically of a *Day of Judgment*. In Matt. 10:15, Jesus says: “Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the *day of judgment*, than for that city.” This is a very common expression. Read also Matt. 11:22, 24; 12:36. We turn to Peter’s second epistle. “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the *day of judgment* to be punished” (chap. 2:9). Again: “The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (chap. 3:7).

Frequently it is called the *Day of the Lord*. So, for instance, in I Cor. 1:8, “Who (the Lord Jesus Christ) shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the *day of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” Again, chap. 5:5, “To deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the *day of the Lord Jesus*.” Also I Thess. 5:2, “For yourselves know perfectly that the *day of the Lord* so cometh as a thief in the night.” St. Peter uses the same comparison to illustrate the suddenness and unexpectedness of the arrival of the day of judgment. He says: “But 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” (2 Peter 3:10).

Sometimes it is called the *Last Day*. This expression is used in connection with the resurrection. Jesus said to the Jews: “This is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day” (John 6:39.—See also verses 40, 44, and 54). Martha spoke of the “resurrection at the last day” (John 11:24). And Jesus warned the Jews that the last day will be a day of judgment: “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the *last day*” (John 12:48).

The doctrine of the last day as a day of judgment was so well known, and the people were so familiar with it, that it was sufficient to refer to it not only as the *Great Day*, but simply as *That Day*, or even as *The Day*. St. Jude in his epistle uses the expression “great day,” v. 6: “And the angels which kept not their first estate (that is, their principality), but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the *great day*. “ — In the following passages judgment day is referred to as that day. Jesus said: Many will say to me in *that day*. Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?” etc. (Matt. 7:22). Warning His disciples that no one can foretell the end of the world, Jesus said: “But of *that day* and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matt. 24:36). Paul uses the same expression, “that day,” for instance in 2 Thess. 1:10, “When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe ... *in that day*.” In 2 Timothy he expressed his firm conviction: “that he (our Savior Jesus Christ) is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against *that day*,” and then he is ready to lay down his life in the sure hope that “henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at *that day*, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (chap. 1:12; 4:8). — In I Cor. 3:13, Paul refers to judgment day simply as *the day*: “Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for *the day* shall declare it.... The fire shall try every man’s work, of what sort it is.”

Jesus the Judge

The question, who will preside as judge in any trial, is very important.

There is first of all the question of competence. Does the judge know the law, not only in general, but in particular every paragraph that may have a bearing on a case under consideration? Does he understand, not only the letter, but the purpose, the spirit, of the law? Has he experience? Has he by natural endowment and as a result of proper training and experience developed the ability of weighing the evidence, of recognizing what is important, and what is less important, and what, perhaps, may be altogether irrelevant? Is he interested in the facts of the case, or is he, perhaps, unduly concerned about technicalities? The old Romans had a saying: *Summum jus, summa injuria*, that is, the technically highest right may often practically work out the greatest injury. —This leads to the further question of openmindedness. Has the judge some preconceived ideas? Is he prejudiced one way or the other? Is he fairminded? —Will he accept bribes? (Refrigerators, mink coats.)

These and similar questions are important in all human courts, but even the greatest care does not eliminate the possibility of error, due to human limitations. To err is human. But these and similar questions need not worry us concerning the final judgment. It will be God’s judgment. God is wisdom personified. He is justice personified. With Him there is no respect of persons. This is indeed cause for fear and trembling to all those that are guilty; but the absolute fairness of the judgment dare not be questioned.

But here another factor enters in, a discussion of which we must defer to our next study. Today we just list a few passages which affirm that God, the Creator of the world, will also be the supreme Judge. When Abraham pleaded with God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah, he addressed Him as the “Judge of all the earth” (Gen. 18:25). The psalmist sings: “The Lord shall endure for ever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment. And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness” (9:7 8). Paul speaks about “the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel”

(Rom. 2:16). Here is the new factor which we plan to discuss in our next study. God will not conduct the final judgment in person; He has commissioned Jesus Christ to serve as Judge.



In the last passage which we considered in our previous study, Rom. 2:16, mention is made of the fact that God will not carry out the final judgment in person, but will do it “by Jesus Christ.”

There are many passages which assure us of this fact, a fact which we also confess in the Second Article, namely, that “from thence He (Jesus Christ) shall come to judge the quick and the dead.” When Jesus described the final judgment to us in vivid details He said: “When the *Son of man* shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations” (Matt. 25:31–32). He then goes on to tell how He will divide all men into two groups, how He will pronounce judgment on each group, how He will verify His verdict in each case, how He will order the execution of His sentence, which will be carried out without delay.

On another occasion Jesus referred more briefly to the coming judgment, but maintained just as definitely that He Himself will be the Judge. “For the *Son of man* shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works” (Matt. 16:27).

In speaking about the judgment Paul not only says, as in Rom 2:16, that God will judge the world by Jesus Christ, he calls Jesus the Judge. “We shall all stand before the *judgment seat of Christ*” (Rom. 14:10). And again: “For we must all appear before the *judgment seat of Christ*, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

It is not a chance coincidence that Jesus will be the Judge, it is God who has so ordained it. That is what Paul told the Greek philosophers in Athens on Mars Hill: “Because he (God) hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained” (Acts 17:31). So Paul. Similarly Peter in the house of Cornelius: “And he (God) commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he (Jesus of Nazareth) which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead” (Acts 10:42).

Concerning Jesus even His enemies admitted that He could not be bribed. When about to ask Him concerning tribute to Caesar, they addressed Him: “Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men” (Matt. 22:16). Yes, Jesus was fair, fair to a degree far above anything that His enemies might have been ready to concede. Paul calls Him the righteous Judge, whom he was soon to face. In the last epistle which we have from Paul’s pen we read these words: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).

Judge, Because He Is Our Redeemer

Why should God elect Jesus as our Judge, and delegate the final judgment of the world to Him? Jesus Himself tells us. Speaking about the Father as having “life in himself,” He adds: “And hath given him (the Son) authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.” “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father” (John 5:27, 22, 23). — Because Jesus is the Son of man, because He is our Savior, because He not only took our flesh and blood upon Himself but also humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant, because He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross: therefore the Father highly exalted Him and gave Him a name above every name, therefore He also ordained Him to be the final Judge.

What does that mean? It means, first of all, that the final judgment will be a part of our redemption. It belongs as an integral part, as an essential part, to the work which the Father assigned to the Son when He made Him our Savior. Judgment is a part of the work of salvation. That should make us hopeful and fill our hearts with joy. The judge is not coming for the purpose of ferreting out our secret sins. Those He has all long ago taken upon Himself and paid for them with His lifeblood. No, He is coming to finish in us the work of

redemption. He performed a part of it on Calvary. He is performing a part of it today, being at the right hand of God and making intercession for us; also by sending us His Holy Spirit to call us out of the world, to kindle faith in our hearts, to sanctify and preserve us unto the end. But the work is not yet completed. Jesus will return for judgment, to make a final separation between us and the unbelievers. Therefore, in speaking about His return to His disciples Jesus said: "Look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28).

Jesus could truly say, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." And this will continue "even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:18, 20).—In the great chapter on the work of our Savior, particularly on His sacrifice, His innocent suffering and death in our stead, Isaiah mentions also this that because of His sacrifice the whole work of the Lord will be placed in His charge. "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand" (chap. 53:10). The pleasure of the Lord is to see us saved; and since Jesus brought Himself as a sin-offering for us, He is the man who will see the whole work successfully through to a prosperous end.—Speaking figuratively, Isaiah said: "The key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder, so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open" (chap. 22:22).

Associate Judges

Before we take up the important question to which standard the final judgment will be conducted, on what grounds a man will be acquitted or condemned, we may look at a few passages which speak about associate judges whom Jesus will employ. Nothing definite beyond the mere fact can be stated.

In an answer to Peter Jesus once said: "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). How this will be done is not said.—Already here on earth we are to do some judging. To an impenitent sinner we are to declare that he has no share in the kingdom of God; while to a repentant sinner we are to proclaim the verdict of forgiveness. See Matt. 18:15–18. And in I Cor. 5:12 Paul says, "Do not ye judge them that are within?" And in the next chapter he says, "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" (v. 3). — How we are to judge in the Church here on earth we are told, but about the manner of our participation in the final judgment nothing is said.

There is another passage where evidently a judgment by comparison is indicated. Jesus said to the Jews: "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here." Hence the greater sin of the Jews, who rejected Jesus. And again: "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:41, 42).



The Lord is risen." "He is risen indeed." With words like these the Christians of earlier days greeted one another on Easter morning. Christ, who had died in disgrace on Friday, arose in triumph from the grave on Easter Sunday. He died for the sins of the world, of every individual sinner, for my sins and your sins — and He arose for the assurance that the tremendous debt had been paid in full, every sinner's guilt had been wiped out, every sinner's record, your account and my account on the books of God, is clear. He proclaimed peace, the forgiveness of all sins. — Do we wonder at the joyful greeting of the early Christians on Easter Day? What greater joy can come to a condemned sinner than the announcement that his debt has been canceled and that he is a free man? Now, the same Jesus who died for our sins and rose again for our justification, He has been appointed by God to be the final Judge of all the world. And He was appointed to this exalted position precisely because of the fact that He by His death had achieved our salvation and by His resurrection showed that He stood ready to divide the spoils of His victory.

Christ the Judge

Ordinarily we think of God as the supreme Judge. Rightly so. So the Scriptures speak of Him in many places. In Rom. 2:16, Paul speaks about the day “when *God* shall judge the secrets of men.” The Psalms often sing about the judgments of God, the God and Lord of Israel: “The Lord shall endure forever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment. And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness” (Ps. 9:7–8).

But God will not conduct the final judgment in person. The Romans passage to which we referred continues: “by *Jesus Christ*, according to my gospel.” This is not the only time that Paul refers to this fact. When he addressed his critics on Mars Hill in Athens he said that God commands all men everywhere to repent “because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that *man whom he hath ordained*.” He was referring to Christ, as is clear from his description that God “hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:3 1). At this point Paul was interrupted, else he would have proclaimed to the Athenians what the death and resurrection of Jesus meant for them, to lead them to repentance and faith, so that they could stand before Christ’s judgment throne. — In his farewell letter to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:8) he rejoices to meet Christ as his Judge on the last day: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which *the Lord, the righteous judge*, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

In a previous study we referred to Jesus’ words about His sitting on a “throne of glory” (Matt. 19:28). In the vivid description of the last judgment which He gives us in Matt. 25:31–46, He plainly mentions Himself as the Judge: “When the *Son of man* shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations,” etc., to be judged by Him. In Rom. 14:10 and 2 Cor. 5:10, Paul speaks of the “judgment seat of Christ.” — Also Peter in the house of Cornelius reminded his hearers that “he (Jesus) commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead” (Acts 10:42).

All these passages, and others that might be added, are a sufficient basis for our confession in the Second Article: “From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”

Why Is Jesus the Judge?

Jesus Himself answers this question for us. The Father “hath given him authority to execute judgment also, *because he is the Son of man*” (John 5:27). Jesus is the Son of man. He is the one whom God in the very first promise called “the Seed of the woman.” He is the one of whom John testified that “the Word was made flesh.” He is the one whom Paul described in these words: “In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). He is our Savior, whom God sent to redeem us. He is the “Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.”

And now Jesus says that just because He is the Son of man, our Savior, God has appointed Him to be the Judge of the world. “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22). Think of the great chapter in Isaiah (53) about the suffering of our Savior, which He carried out successfully for our redemption. Isaiah adds: “The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand” (v. 10). The Lord had planned our salvation because He loved us and had compassion on us. Then He appointed Jesus to carry out His plan, for His good “pleasure” as Isaiah calls it. And the work “prospered” in His hand. He carried it out most willingly and with complete success. That part which was to be achieved through suffering and death was finished on the cross. Its success was attested by the resurrection of Jesus. Now also the remainder of the Lord’s plan will be left in the hands of Jesus, sure to prosper in His hand. This includes His present rule of the world, being seated at the right hand of God, and His return for judgment. Really, all power has been given to Him in heaven and on earth.

What does this mean for us? It means that the judgment will be the most happy event in our career before we enter the eternal joys of heaven. The Judge will be our Brother, who loves us, who was so concerned about our eternal salvation that in bitter agony He laid down His life for us. As He loved us on earth, so He will love us to the end. He will not be a cold, disinterested Judge. His warm heart will reach out to us from His judgment seat just as fervently as it did from Gethsemane and from the cross.

The Judge will have sympathy with us. He will understand our condition. He took on Himself our flesh in all its weakness. He committed no sin. His flesh was not sin-infested, but it bore all the weaknesses which sin brought down on us. He knows from personal experience what it means to be tempted. He was tempted like us, only without yielding a hair's breadth to sin. But after He had successfully battled off the attacks of the tempter in the wilderness, oh, how exhausted He was! Angels came and ministered unto Him. He knows how difficult it is to keep faith. We often sink so low in our faith that we do not even know what to pray for and how to pray for it properly. Our prayer sounds more like an unintelligible groaning, which the Holy Spirit carries before the throne of our Father and interprets it for us. Jesus knows what that means. He went through the same experience on the cross— only again without sin! —when in that heavy darkness He exclaimed: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” — Yes, Why? — so He groans.

Yes, the Judge understands our difficulties and our weaknesses. He tasted them Himself. And by so suffering them in our stead He provided a remedy—the only remedy, but an all-sufficient remedy — for us. And just because He did that, because He became the Son of man for us, God appointed Him to be our Judge. We can look forward to our judgment with the greatest of confidence. “Then look up,” Jesus says, “and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28). In the words of Isaiah: “The key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder, so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open” (22:22).

More will have to be said on this point.



In thinking about judgment day we are told to rejoice because our Judge will be none other than Jesus, the same one who so loved us that He laid down His life for us, the same one who personally tasted all our difficulties and understands our weaknesses. From His warm heart we can expect a sympathetic judgment, particularly since in His judgment He will wind up His Savior work. Just as His suffering and death was a step in His course, a part of His work of salvation, so the judgment will be the last step, putting the finishing touches, the golden crown, on His endeavor.

The Standard of Judgment

Very much depends on the question, by what standard will the final judgment be conducted, on what basis will the final verdict be rendered? When we think of the judgment which will decide our fate for all eternity the memory of our many sins tends to make us feel very uneasy. We realize that in spite of our best efforts we have committed many grievous sins in thought, in word, in deed. If the standard of the Ten Commandments is to be applied to them, we are doomed. But that is the way we often picture the great judgment, that all our works, our sins of commission and of omission, will be recounted and evaluated on the basis of the law of Moses. Hence our fear.

Jesus tells us to take a different view of our judgment. Listen to this remark of His: “The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). Jesus makes His word the deciding standard. All the words that He ever spoke were along these lines: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). That word will decide every case. Every one who came to Jesus, no matter how heavy his burden of sin was, will receive rest, perfect rest, the glorious sabbatical rest of heaven. And anyone who refuses to come to Jesus will be crushed under his burden of sin.

In his prediction about the last judgment Jesus shows how His Gospel will be used as a standard. He mentions some works, works which the believers have done and which the unbelievers have failed to do. What are these works? Not works that involve fornication or adultery, or lying and slander, or stealing and robbery, or even murder. No, but works which prove whether the person had come to Jesus or not, by showing an interest, or lack of interest, in Jesus' brethren. That will decide the matter. The believers did these works in such a simple, unassuming way that they do not even remember; and the unbelievers, who kept a record of their good deeds, stayed so far away from Jesus that they must plead ignorance: When did we see Thee?

Thus Jesus will judge every one according to the attitude he took over against His Gospel. St. Paul says the same in Rom. 2:16: "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel."

We are always afraid that Jesus might apply the Law of Moses. And that thought robs us of a great deal of joy in our lives. Instead of looking forward to judgment with joyful anticipation as the day that will bring us complete salvation, we shiver and tremble. In order to assure our hearts against such doubts we take another look at the matter.

The Epistle to the Hebrews calls Jesus "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever" (chap. 13:8). Just as He is today, the same will He be on judgment day.

Jesus sent His disciples into all the world to preach. What should they preach? Should they teach people to lead a decent life? Should they expound the laws of Moses to them, lure them into good living by the promises of a reward which the Law contains; and frighten them with its threats? No, He sent them to preach the Gospel. St. Mark records His commission in these words: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (chap. 16:16). St. Matthew says: "Teach all nations (that is, make them into disciples of Jesus), baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (chap. 28:19). — St. John, in recording Jesus' commission to His disciples, indicated the meaning of the Gospel message; it means forgiveness of sins. "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (chap. 20:21–23).

The Gospel message of the free forgiveness of our sins for Jesus' sake has by His commission been preached throughout the world. This message we read in the Bible, which He has given us. This message we hear in our Sunday services in the sermon and in a formal announcement after Confession. On the free forgiveness of our sins we base our prayers, when as dear children we approach our heavenly Father. For this forgiveness of our sins we thank Him and sing praises to His name in our hymns. Thus Jesus Himself ordered it.

We are not misunderstanding the Gospel when we accept it as a judicial verdict of acquittal, as a pronouncement of justification. That is precisely what it amounts to, and what Jesus wants it to be. This is a truth which St. Paul presents very fully in his epistles, particularly in the one to the Romans. "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Again: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Again: "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (chap. 3:24, 28; 4:5).

When the question of justification comes up, then the Law of Moses must be left out of consideration. To the jailor's anxious question: "What must I do to be saved?" Paul answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:30, 31). To the Romans he wrote: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (chap. 10:4). In his youth Paul had led a very strict life according to the Law, for in that way he hoped to attain righteousness. But after he learned the Gospel, he changed his opinion. "Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil. 3:9). And when Peter by his conduct gave the impression as though the law did have something to do with our righteousness and justification, Paul rebuked him sharply: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even

we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal. 2:16).

This is the way Jesus has had the Gospel preached on earth now for close to 2000 years: a judgment that we have been pronounced righteous on the basis of His merits, without any merit or worthiness of our own. He never changed an iota.

Will He suddenly reverse Himself on judgment day? Will He revoke His Gospel proclamation and turn to the Law? Will He use the Law as His standard and judge us on the basis of our works? — Not as long as Heb. 13:8 proclaims the glorious truth: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.”



Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and throughout eternity, the same one who now so lovingly invites us, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” the same one who sent His Apostles into all the world with the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins, and then commissioned His Church to continue this work until the end of time—He will also be the Judge on the last day. He will not reverse Himself. The Gospel which He instructed His Church to proclaim will be His standard of judgment, on the basis of which He will render His verdict.

What does that mean for us, the believers?

Verdict of Acquittal

It means, in the first place, that the final judgment will not be a judgment at all for us in the ordinary sense of the word. Jesus Himself said as much on several occasions. In that midnight interview with Nicodemus He said, “He that believeth on him (that is, on the Son of God, whom God sent into the world to save sinners) is not condemned” (literally, is not judged, compare Luther’s German Bible: *wird nicht gerichtet* — John 3:18). In His dispute with the Jews in Jerusalem, after He had healed the impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda on a Sabbath day, He solemnly declared: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, *hath everlasting life*, and shall not come into condemnation (literally again, *into judgment*); but is passed from death into life” (John 5:24). In a passage to which we referred in a previous study Jesus says that the final judgment will simply spell “redemption” for us (Luke 21:28).

There will be no examination of our works, no weighing of how serious were our offenses, no attempt at finding mitigating or aggravating circumstances, and the like: the mere fact that we believed in Jesus Christ will decide the case in our favor.

But are there not passages which tell us that we shall be judged according to our works? Does not Paul say in Rom. 2:6 that God “will render to every man *according to his deeds*”? Does not the same Apostle warn us in II Cor. 5:10: “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, *according to that he hath done*, whether it be good or bad”? And St. Peter calls the one “who without respect of persons judgeth *according to every man’s work*” (I Pet. 1:17).

Yes, does not Jesus Himself in describing the last judgment to us say that He will be guided, in rendering His verdict, by the works which the believers have done? “I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink,” etc. (Matt. 25:35). Let us look a little more closely at Jesus’ words. What does He say about worshiping God, about praying to Him and giving Him thanks? What does He say about going to church and hearing the Word of God? What does He say about honoring father and mother? And so we might go on through the Ten Commandments. Jesus breathes not one syllable about sins or good works done in compliance with or in violation of the Law of Moses. He mentions instances of help done to His “brethren,” even the “least” among His brethren, and says that He accepts them as a service personally rendered to Himself. The point is that these works in themselves look very insignificant, they will not make the headlines, they are not works which the world acclaims as “good turns,” etc. They are the simple outflow of a man’s relation to

Christ, they manifest his faith. The believers themselves do not even remember them. Jesus does not speak about eleemosynary works in general, no, only such as manifest a person's connection with Him.

The lesson which we should take to heart from this is that faith produces a new life. Faith is not some theory, or some philosophy, which may be stored away in our mind just as other matters of information are. One may believe that Columbus discovered America on the 12th of October, 1492 and this bit of correct information will not have the slightest effect on his mode of living. He knows the fact, and that is all. Faith is not like that. It cannot be stored away in the memory. It is a powerful, a very active thing. it produces a new life, a life which will express itself, among others, in a sympathetic interest for the welfare of Christ's brethren. If it does not, then faith is dead, it is nonexistent. In this sense Jesus will judge us according to our works, whether they are the dead works of our natural heart, or the works which manifest the presence of the new life of faith.— In this same sense also Paul and Peter refer to our works as deciding our verdict. They are an outward expression of the inner life of the soul, whether that be the new spiritual life of faith, or the natural life based on other considerations.

Record Books

Faith will decide the final judgment. Where there is faith, a man's works will not be examined. In his case the purpose of the judgment is not to *find* the verdict, to arrive at it after a careful investigation of all the evidence, but only to proclaim it publicly. In this life a man's faith cannot be seen. On the basis of a man's confession you recognize him as a brother, a fellow Christian — or not. Only God can see faith itself. On that day Christ will openly acknowledge the believers as His own, and will publicly proclaim them as legitimate heirs of the kingdom of God which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world. This truth is so forth vividly in the Scriptures by a reference to a double set of record books which God keeps.

In the Book of Revelation John records a vision which he saw of the last judgment. He says, "And I saw the dead, small and great stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.... And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:12, 15). — God has the names of His believers recorded in the book of life. That settles the matter.

This book of life is frequently mentioned in the Scriptures, for instance, in Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 21:27; Phil. 4:3. Jesus comforted His disciples, "Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). A similar expression is found also in Heb. 12:23. Moses once asked God that, if He could not forgive the sins of Israel, He should also blot his (Moses) name out of His book, Ex. 32:32, 33. Also Ps. 69:28 speaks about a "blotting out." See in addition Dan. 12:1; Mal. 3:16.

There are other matters that must be considered in this connection, but we defer them to our next study.



We concluded our previous study with a brief reference to a double set of record books, one of which is significantly called the Book of Life. The word "books" is a figurative expression for God's knowledge. God is omniscient. He knows all things, even the secret things of a man's heart. Before the eyes of men we can hide our thoughts. We can, for instance, put on a very friendly look and wear a winning smile, while our heart entertains thoughts of malice, of jealousy and hatred. Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss. Men cannot tell the difference, but God can. He knows all things, even the most secret thoughts of our heart.

And He remembers. You may forget. There are things of your past life which you remember only very dimly, and many things you have forgotten altogether. Not so with God. Before His eyes all your thoughts, also such as you yourself have forgotten long ago, still stand out as clearly and distinctly as in the moment when they flashed through your mind. Before God's eyes it makes no difference whether things are present, or future, or past. He knows them all alike.

Just now, in connection with the final judgment, we are concerned with God's knowledge of the past, with His memory. His memory is as exact and as vivid as though all things, including every little detail, were with painstaking care recorded in a book. In fact, His memory exceeds all written records in reliability. Not the slightest detail is overlooked in His memory. That is the truth which the Scriptures wish to impress on our hearts when they speak of God's record books.

Warnings

The Book of Life is mentioned for our comfort. In it the names of the believers are recorded with the blood of Jesus. That means, the fact is recorded that their case is settled. Christ by the sacrifice of Himself has made complete atonement for all their sins. God has cast all their sins behind His back. He has dropped them into the depths of the sea. The record of the believers is clear. There are no unsettled charges left. So it has been entered in the Book of Life. Therefore, if any man's name is found recorded in the Book of Life, there is nothing more to be done. His is a closed case. All that is left is that this fact be announced, and that he be given the crown of life.

But if a man's name is not found in the Book of Life, that is incontestable evidence that he refused to accept the salvation prepared also for him by our Savior. Yes, Jesus lived and died also for him. Jesus took also his sins on Himself He suffered for him. Also the guilt of the impenitent sinner was included in the agony of hell which caused Jesus to exclaim, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Also for him Jesus bowed the head and gave up the ghost.—By his impenitence the sinner despised all that, and now his name is not found written in the Book of Life.

This means that he will have to stand or fall on the record of his own deeds. The record books will be consulted; and the verdict is a foregone conclusion. His record is one of a life begun in sin, conducted in sin, and ended in sin. The fact that he in unbelief rejected the salvation which Jesus procured for him and offered to him is enough to condemn him. "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Matt. 16:16). Some of the passages that mention the Book of Life speak about a "blotting out" of some names. "Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous" (Ps. 69:28). A Christian must not live in carnal security. If he should say, I have been baptized, my name has been entered on the church register, now I can live as I please, nothing can harm me — then he will by that attitude blot out his own name.

We Christians still have the sinful flesh, which causes us much trouble and temptation. The rule of the flesh has, indeed, been broken, and the dominion has been wrenched from its power; but the flesh, our Old Adam, constantly strives to regain its lost control. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit" (Gal. 5:17). The Old Adam must be drowned daily by repentance and faith. The flesh must be crucified. This results in a very painful struggle. St. Paul, after describing his own struggle against his Old Adam, exclaims: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24). We have the promise of victory. St. Paul continues in the next verse: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." And in the next chapter he exclaims triumphantly: "In all things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 37–39).

As a club against our Old Adam there are given to us warnings regarding the coming judgment. Jesus said to His disciples: "I say unto you That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:36, 37). Again: "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matt. 16:27). We repeat also the warning of St. Paul which he addressed to the Corinthian Christians: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one

may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (II Cor. 5:10).

We shall never be able to reform our Old Adam. He will always continue to resist the spirit. It will always be necessary that we watch and pray. The moment we cease to be on our guard, or forget to be sober and vigilant, or relax in our prayers, the enemy stands ready to take advantage of us. But against the wiles of the devil, against the allurements of the world, against the lusts of our own Old Adam, we may use the warnings which the Scriptures contain concerning the coming judgment.

Hope

Jesus encouraged us to look up and lift up our heads when the signs would show that judgment day is drawing nigh. Judgment day will mean final and complete redemption for us.

One thought sometimes troubles Christians, They are sure in faith of their salvation, but they are also conscious of many sins which they have committed, and of which they are ashamed. Will their sins be published on judgment day?—Jesus says that the believers will not come into judgment. Their sins have been taken care of. Their slate was wiped clean when the forgiveness of all their sins was proclaimed to them.

What does God say about forgiven sins? “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity? ... Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depth of the sea” (Micah 7:18,19). God says: “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins.” “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins” (Isa. 44:22; 43:25).—God will not remember our sins, no, never, least of all on judgment day in the presence of the unbelievers. Christians will not be embarrassed. May God bless our studies of the coming judgment with a deepening and strengthening of our faith in our dear Savior.



In our study of the final judgment we saw the grace of God stand out in bold relief For those who believe in Jesus Christ, their Savior, and put their trust in His love and in the righteousness which He secured for us by His holy living and by His sacrificial suffering and death, there will be no searching investigation of their life and conduct. David’s adultery and murder will not be considered; Peter’s denial will not be reviewed; Paul’s persecutions of the Church will not be mentioned. And if the devil should bring up these things—as at present he is doing constantly before the throne of God—his objections will be overruled. They are not pertinent, not valid, in the case of the believers. These have committed themselves to the grace of God, and on that basis their case will be handled and decided.

Then the grace of God will be vindicated in glory. Here on earth it is not understood, it is ridiculed and rejected. It is denounced, not only as impractical, as foolishness, but as dangerous, as undermining true morality. If God’s grace provided a cancellation of our guilt, if anyone can rid himself of the burden of his sin by appealing to God’s grace: what incentive is there left for making an honest effort to lead a clean, a consecrated life? What will happen to the morality of the world if justification is made so easy to obtain by a simple appeal to the grace of God? Yes, Christ crucified still is to the Greeks foolishness and to the Jews a stumbling block. The world cannot understand grace. As far as unbelief can see, the rule of grace spells licentiousness. Thus it has always been that precisely the more serious-minded among the unbelievers opposed grace most bitterly. They did so, and thought they had to do so, in the interest of clean living.

Even we Christians do not always fully appreciate God’s grace in Christ. Do we not frequently, when we have done a little good, feel as though the forgiveness of our sins were thereby made more secure? as if we had done a little something to merit God’s grace and pardon? And on the other hand, when we have been overtaken by a sin, do we always take refuge in the grace of God? And still more, are we not often tempted that, like the world, we see in grace an opening to take life easy?

On judgment day God’s grace will shine forth in full glory.

How is it that men do not appreciate grace? The understanding of grace was lost in Adam's fall. Let us look at this fall, and view it in the light of judgment day.

The gist of the temptation was that man should break away from God, should disregard His Word, His commandment and His threat; he should take matters into his own hands. He should set himself up as a god in his own rights, and should determine for himself what is good and evil.

That was the temptation, and that is precisely what happened. Are people eager to hear God's Word, the message of His grace? Are the people crowding the churches where this message is proclaimed? Do they not, rather, sneeringly criticize the Word of God? And on what basis do they criticize it? On the basis of their own opinion. Men try to determine what according to their own ideas God can have said, or cannot have said. According to their own opinion they try to set up a standard of good behavior, and then they demand that God Himself recognize their standard and judge people according to it. This is the idea of the common unlettered man: Do good, and you'll be OK; and the same is the idea of the philosopher, no matter how high-sounding the phrases may be which he uses, and how involved the language in which he expresses his ideas. The ideas of the world are always law ideas, ideas that have to do with reward and merit.

So it has been since Adam's fall. Man became blinded. He lost the understanding of grace, and all appreciation for it.

In the final judgment God will vindicate His grace. All men will see it in its glory. The unbelievers will learn to their consternation how they, when they considered themselves as wise, only made fools of themselves. And the believers will rejoice that they unconditionally threw themselves on the grace and mercy of God. They will forever praise Him for it.

A New Heaven and A New Earth

The present earth was created for the benefit of man. The whole Scripture speaks about the earth as the abode of man, as, for instance, Ps. 115:16 says very briefly: "The earth hath he (God) given to the children of men." Having been created for man, it shares the fate of man. Before man fell into sin, the earth was a beautiful paradise, but after the fall it was turned into a barren waste, bringing forth thorns and thistles, and yielding to man fruit for his subsistence only by the sweat of his face. "Cursed is the ground for thy sake," God said to Adam (Gen. 3:17). Although the creature had not committed any sin, yet it "was made subject to vanity." It groans and travails in pain together till now (Rom. 8:20,22).

What will happen to the world on judgment day? It will disappear. The Psalmist sings about this: "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands." Then he continues: "They shall perish ... yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed" (Ps. 102:25,26).

This will happen in a mighty catastrophe. Jesus Himself said that "the powers of heaven shall be shaken;" yes, "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," says St. Peter, adding "that all these things shall be dissolved" (II Pet. 3:10,11).

It is not definitely stated that this will result in a complete annihilation of the present world. It will be a "passing away," as it is frequently expressed (for instance, Matt. 5:18; 24:35). But St. Paul applies this to the appearance of the world: "The fashion of this world passeth away" (I Cor. 7:31). And in the chapter in Romans, to which we referred above, he even says: "The creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

No matter what happens to the present world, being under the curse because of our sin, it will give place to a new heaven and a new earth. This is mentioned in several passages, for instance, in II Pet. 3:13; Is. 65:17; 66:22; Rev. 21:1. The greatest thing that will distinguish the new world from the old is compressed by Peter into the short word: "Wherein dwelleth righteousness" (II Pet. 3:13). The fact that there will be no sin in the

new earth, that there is no danger of falling into sin because no tempter will be permitted to enter—this makes the new earth a veritable, everlasting paradise.

“Oh, that we were there.”



HELL

In describing the final judgment to us Jesus says that He will divide all people into two groups, just as a “shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.” He will place the sheep on His right hand, and the goats on the left. There will be only these two classes. The verdict which the Judge will render will also consist of just two sentences. To those on His right hand He will say: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” To those on the left He will say: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” The execution will also be twofold: “And these (on the left) shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.” A tremendous EITHER—OR.

We shall now, for our warning, look at the many statements which the Scriptures contain concerning hell, the place of the damned. After that we shall conclude our study of eternity by looking, for our comfort and encouragement, at the rich and beautiful description which God presents to us about life in heaven.

Before we start we recall what we found in the very beginning of these studies on eternity, namely that we are here speaking of things about which we have absolutely no experience (see *Northwestern Lutheran* for Aug. 22, 1954, p. 262). No one has ever been in heaven, or in hell and returned to give a report. Moreover, in the study of the resurrection we saw that when we rise, our bodies will undergo a tremendous change. They will indeed be the same bodies in which we walked about on earth, but their condition will be radically different. The bodies of believers will be changed by the Lord in such a way that they will be like unto His glorious body (Phil. 3:21). And the bodies of unbelievers will be “an abhorring to all flesh” (Isa. 66:24). We know what is pleasant or unpleasant to our bodies in their present state, but what will be pleasant or unpleasant to them in their changed condition after the resurrection, we cannot even imagine. We hope and pray that God in His due time will grant us to experience the joys of heaven, and we hope and pray that we never from experience learn to know the terrors of hell.

Eternal Damnation Is A Fact

There are many people who question whether there really is a hell, and if there is one, whether it is actually as hot as it is made out to be. They are doing so contrary to the testimony of their own conscience. They stifle the voice of conscience. St. Paul speaks about this in Rom. 2:15, 16: “Their conscience also bearing witness ... in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men.” Conscience is aware of a coming judgment and warns people about the terrible punishment which will then be meted out to sinners. Paul grew up and lived in Greek surroundings. He was familiar with what the Greek conscience had to say about a hereafter. They believed that there is a Tartarus, where wicked people will be subjected to unparalleled torture. For examples compare their legends of Sisyphus and Tantalus.

We have the more sure word of Scripture. And Scripture is full of descriptive names for the punishment of unbelievers after judgment. It would take up too much space to print out the passages in full; we shall just list the expressions and note some places where they occur. There is the word “hell” (for instance, Matt. 5:29,30; 10:28; 23:15; Mark 9:43; Luke 16:23; Jas. 3:6). Then there is “hell fire” (Matt. 5:22); “damnation of hell” (Matt. 23:33); “hell and destruction” (Prov. 15:11). There is “everlasting fire” (Matt. 25:41); “everlasting punishment” (Matt. 25:46); “everlasting destruction” (II Thess. 1:9). There is “the deep” (Luke 8:3 1; Rom. 10:7); there is “eternal judgment” (Heb. 6:2); there is “outer darkness” (Matt. 22:13); there is “chains of

darkness” (II Pet. 2:4); “mist of darkness” (II Pet. 2:17). There is “second death” (Rev. 2:11; 20:14,15; 21:8). There is “place of torment” (Luke 16:28); “lake of fire” and “brimstone” (Rev. 20:14, 15; 21:8).

Since Scripture uses so many different names for hell, who will dare to question its reality? To deny the existence of hell means to call God a liar. And if anyone neglects these numerous and faithful warnings, he will have no one but himself to blame if in the end he will hear that awful judgment thundering in his ears; “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

There are many who deny that damnation will be endless, eternal. We shall investigate their ideas in a later study. Today we shall take notice of one fact only, namely, that “eternal damnation” and “eternal life” are frequently found in parallel statements, thus making the one as real as the other, so that you cannot deny the one without at the same time eliminating the other. Look at Christ’s concluding statement concerning the execution of His final passage where Peter mentions this judgment: “And these shall go away into *everlasting punishment*, but the righteous into *life eternal*.” Our English Bible uses two words, *everlasting* and *eternal*. They are synonymous and mean the same thing. The Greek New Testament has one and the same word in both members of the statement. Thus the two are inseparably linked together: if there is no eternal damnation, then the hope of eternal life is shattered likewise.

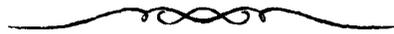
A similar statement is found in John 3:36: “He that believeth on the Son hath *everlasting life*: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God *abideth* on him.”

Where is hell? Is it a place, or is it merely a name for a condition?

Here again we must be on our guard. The relations of time, of space, of causality, and the like, were created by God for this present world. What will be the condition in the new heaven and new earth, we cannot tell. Time, for instance, will merge into eternity. What will happen to space, we are not told. Hell is spoken of as a place, not only in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, but also in historical accounts. In the parable the Rich Man speaks about “this *place of torment*,” and Abraham points to a “great gulf” which is fixed between heaven and hell. But this is a parable, in which the point of the lesson is that the proper and only way to escape hell is to “hear Moses and the prophets” (Luke 16:19–31). But not only in this parable does the term “place” occur but also in the account of Judas’ suicide: “Judas by transgression fell (from his ministry and apostleship) that he might go to his own *place*” (Acts 1:25). — In the Second Article we speak about Christ’s descent into hell. In the descent of our Lord he calls hell a “prison,” a designation for a certain place.

Compare also such passages where both heaven and hell are mentioned: “Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be *cast out* into outer darkness” (Matt. 8:11, 12). The Book of Revelation, which is a book of symbols and figures, has this word: “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the *city*. For *without* are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie” (chap. 22:14, 15).

Our theologians speak of hell as a “somewhere.” — We have to take a closer look in a future study.



It seems that sinful mankind will never learn to use the Word of God aright. God gave us His Word for our salvation. When we fell into sin we lost the great blessing and happiness of living in communion with our heavenly Father. In other words, we died. For to be separated from God means to be separated from life. Then God gave us His Word, the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. By assuring us of the forgiveness of all our sins He restored our dead hearts to a living faith. In His Word He also instructs us about the way of life, and warns us against the dangers of a relapse into death.

Among the warnings that we be on our guard is also the doctrine of hell, telling us about the horrors of hell and about the way to avoid them.

What do men do? Instead of listening attentively to God’s warning, instead of noting carefully the dangers to be avoided, men begin to ask curious questions. Where is hell? What kind of fire is that hellfire?

What about the never-dying worm? Is the agony of hell really never-ending?—We shall not take all of these questions up at once. In our study today we shall consider only the first and the last.

Where Is Hell?

When God created the world He created also the vast expanse of space. When we think of anything in this present world, our thoughts are affected by the concept of space. Something may be far, something may be near. Things may be high or low. They may be to our right or to our left; they may be in front of us or behind us. Each object occupies a certain amount of space in length, in breadth, in thickness. Space is spoken of as being three-dimensional. Moreover, the space filled by one object simply cannot hold another object at the same time.

Thus we are bound in our thinking and speaking by the idea of space. We cannot think of anything as really existing without occupying some space. It may be a very small, a microscopic, an infinitesimal amount of space: but some amount of space is required by every real being. We cannot picture God's omnipresence to ourselves, that He lives without being hemmed in by space, that He fills all space and yet occupies no space.

How things will be with reference to space in the world to come, has not been revealed to us. We should therefore not try to pry too curiously into these matters. When God speaks to us about the world to come He accommodates Himself to our present mode of thinking (which He Himself has given to us in our creation) and pictures things to us in terms of space. Thus also when He warns us against the dangers of hell.

It is common to refer to heaven as above and to hell as below. Christ ascended into heaven, He descended into hell. But what really is up? and what is down? If we should draw a straight line through the earth from our home, for instance, to China, then from our standpoint we would be going down to China, but from their standpoint we would be coming up. Who would be right?

Since hell is always spoken of as being down, some people insist that it must be in the center of the earth.

Many passages are referred to in order to establish this claim. We shall take a brief look at only one, to show that by trying to locate hell from it we are actually losing the main force of the text. We know the story of Korah and his company of 250 princes, how they rebelled against the leadership of Moses. Theirs was a rebellion against God Himself, who had appointed Moses to be the leader of Israel. It was base ingratitude; for if Moses had not led them out of Egypt under the mighty hand of God, they would have still been slaving under those cruel taskmasters. They were punished by God for their rebellion. The earth was rent under their feet and swallowed them alive. Moses records: "They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them" (Num. 16:33). The word which our English Bible renders with pit is *sheol*, the Hebrew word for *hell*. Thus the text literally says that they went down alive into hell. There, people say, you plainly see that hell is in the center of the earth. But they overlook entirely that by the death of Korah God did not want to teach us where hell is, but wanted to warn us against ingratitude and rebellion. The lesson was voiced a few verses previous to the one quoted above. Moses said to the people: "If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the Lord hath not sent me. But if the Lord make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick (alive) into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord" (v. 29–30). The manner of Korah's death was the thing which the people were to notice, and then take the lesson to heart.

Where is hell?—Instead of wasting time on this question let us rather remember a word of the old church father Chrysostomus: "Let us not seek to find out where it is; but how we may escape it."

Will the Pains of Hell be Endless?

This is doubted by many, but it is a part of our Lutheran Confession. Tormented “without end,” says Art. XVII of our Augsburg Confession. —Since we have not enough space left at our disposal we cannot cover this matter completely in this issue of *The Northwestern Lutheran*, so we shall limit ourselves to a few pertinent facts, postponing a discussion to a future study.

In our previous study we heard that in the final judgment Jesus will condemn the unbelievers to hell; and they will go away into “everlasting punishment.”

But what if they should repent? That is the sad thing, they have so hardened their hearts that they cannot repent. When Jesus will charge them that by their conduct they showed that they would have nothing to do with Him, they will answer defiantly: “When saw we thee an hungred” etc.? —In the parable of the missing wedding garment the king asks: “Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” Does the guest then apologize? No, he refuses to answer (Matt. 22:12).— In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus tells us that many will question the fairness of His judgment: “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name” etc.? (Matt. 7:22). There is not the slightest indication of a change of heart. And the Lord is compelled to pronounce the verdict: “I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity. “

Sin is perpetuated in the hearts of the unbelievers, and accordingly also the sentence of death stands forever.



We saw that the unbelievers, even in the final judgment, when facing the verdict of eternal damnation in hell, will refuse to repent. They will try to find alibis, or will boast of good works, or, like the guest without the wedding garment, will remain sullen and silent. They will thus continue in their sins unrepenting.

This, however, does not mean that they will be free to continue their life of sin. Their heart will remain completely sinful, their mouth may also spew out words of cursing and blasphemy amid wailing and gnashing of teeth, but they will not be able to act out their evil cravings. The parable of the guest without a wedding garment ends with the stern verdict of the king: “Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 22:13). Bound hand and foot, unable to stir! No matter how evil his heart, no matter how full of evil intentions, he is frustrated in carrying them out. And this frustration will serve to intensify his agony.

In describing to us Christ’s descent into hell, St. Peter speaks about the wicked people who lived in Noah’s day. Noah warned them in the name of God that God would bring a flood upon the earth if they did not mend their evil ways. They and all their mighty works which they had produced in the course of centuries would be engulfed and swept away. He had faithfully preached to them not only in word, he had underscored the seriousness of the situation by building the ark for his own rescue and that of his family. They disregarded the warning. They went on eating and drinking, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage. When Jesus descended into hell He faced these haughty sinners. But St. Peter says that they were “in prison” (I Pet. 3:19). There they are kept securely, never to be released.

Objections

The thought of never-ending punishment is not a pleasant one. But instead of taking the warning to heart, and instead of carefully doing everything to avoid this terrible fate, men begin to question whether the picture is not overdrawn, whether there really is such a thing as hell with everlasting, endless torment. The objections which they raise are chiefly of two kinds. First they say that it is unconceivable that God should inflict eternal punishment even on the worst of sinners; and then they insist that the Scriptures do not teach the endlessness of damnation. We now take a little closer look at their arguments.

Why should it be inconceivable that God inflicts eternal punishment? What is there about God’s essence that would prevent Him from doing it? They say, God is love. If that is true, then must not His love prevent Him

from pronouncing an endless sentence on anyone? To impose eternal damnation would show that He is cruel and vengeful; and this would annul His love.

They misunderstand love. They confuse love with some wishy-washy sort of sentimentality, with the blind monkey-love of some parents, who fail to restrain their naughty children but let them have their way to their own hurt.

God is love. It is His heart's burning desire that it may be well with us, that we enjoy eternal bliss and happiness in His presence. But just because He is love He must hate everything that would disturb our happiness. He must hate sin, which brings death upon its devotees. His love and His desire for our happiness went so far that He spared not His only-begotten Son, but gave Him for us all, when we had fallen into sin. Those who persist in sin persist in ruining God's blessings of love.

God's love is a holy love— it cannot tolerate sin, which frustrates the best efforts of His love. —We may not always understand God's love; but who are we to sit in judgment and to tell what in His love He can do and what not? “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33). He is “dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting” (I Tim. 6:16). — Instead of criticizing God's judgment let us rather rejoice in His love, and be very careful lest we forfeit it.

People will also say that eternal punishment conflicts with fairness. They say that sin is committed in a moment, at most, sin lasts a lifetime; and it would be unjust to punish such a brief act with endless torment. They forget entirely that the length of a sentence is not determined by the time it took to commit a crime, but by the gravity of the offense.

More must be said in the case of eternal punishment. We already heard that sin is not a matter of such short duration. Unbelievers perpetuate their sin by unrepentance. Moreover, with their sin, as far as they are concerned, they overthrow the holy Law of God and trample it underfoot. With their sin they show their allegiance to God's enemy, the devil. They choose his company rather than God's. “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.... He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.... In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother” (I John 3:4, 8, 10).

God loved also those who attach themselves to the devil to the end, and He redeemed them by the sacrifice of His Son. But what do they do? They refuse to believe in their Savior. God also sent His Spirit into their heart to kindle faith by the word of the Gospel, but they resist His efforts. —Is their sin such a little, short-time affair? Is it unfair of God to continue their punishment as long as they continue in their hostile attitude?— By their own choice they associated themselves with the devil together with their own chosen patron they must go into the everlasting fire prepared for him and his angels (Matt. 25:41).

Men's haughty criticism of God's love and justice goes to show that they are still entangled in the sin with which the devil seduced our first parents: they want to be gods in their own rights, knowing for themselves what is good and evil; and they expect God to bow before their findings.



Those who raise the objection that the endlessness of hell punishment conflicts with God's love and with His justice, also maintain that the Bible does not teach the eternity of damnation. They say that words like “eternal,” “everlasting,” “forever” and others indicate no more than a long period of time, just a long duration, but not necessarily endlessness. — We shall have to look at a few of their prooftexts.

They refer to the Lord's instructions regarding the Passover— “This day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast unto the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance *for ever*” (Ex. 12:14). There, they say, anybody can see that *for ever* does not mean *without end*. They cite also another verse from the same chapter: “Ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons *for ever*” (v. 24). We readily grant that *forever* in these verses does not extend into eternity, because

the text itself indicates to what period of time the word is here applied. It says: “throughout your generations.” When those generations come to an end, then also the *forever* will come to an end with them, but as long as those generations are going, they will be under obligation to observe the Passover.

We look at another case. If a Hebrew slave preferred to stay with his master, instead of claiming his freedom in the Sabbatical year: “Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him *forever*” (Ex. 21:6). It is evident from the situation that forever here does not mean throughout eternity, but as long as the slave shall live. But during the lifetime of the slave, the *forever* applies to every moment up to the last breath of the slave.

Thus it is some qualifying remark in the context which limits the extent of the *forever*. If the *eternal*, *everlasting*, *forever*, and similar expressions, when used of hell punishment, are to be understood in a limited sense, then some limiting modifier must be pointed out. But no such modifier occurs in any of those passages.—Yet the opponents insist that forever must be understood in a limited sense in connection with hell.

Isaiah, in reference to the desolation of Judah caused by hostile forces, speaks about the vengeance which God will wreak on the enemies of His kingdom: “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish (Hebrew: visit) the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days *they shall be visited*” (Isa. 24:21, 22). — They say that the last clause means that the prisoners will be set free. Does *to visit* mean to set free?

We all know that there are different kinds of visits, some pleasant, some not so. The visit of a dear friend is different from the visit of a tax-collector. Also in the Bible the word visit is used in different ways. When Jesus had raised the youth of Nain from the dead, the people glorified God and said, “God hath *visited his people*” (Luke 7:16). That was an altogether different visit from the one announced in the conclusion of the Ten Commandments, “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children” (Ex. 20:5). What does visit mean in the Isaiah passage? The first time it clearly means punishment, as also the King James Bible translates the word. And then Isaiah says that after many days they will still be visited. (The Jewish translation simply says: “After many days shall they be *punished*”) After many days their punishment will still go on.

The opponents of the doctrine of everlasting punishment point to the word “regeneration” in Matt. 19:28, maintaining that the word here means a change for the people in hell, and thus an end of their punishment. The situation was this: Peter asked, “We have forsaken all, and followed thee: what shall we have therefore?” Then Jesus answered him: “Ye which have followed me, in the *regeneration* when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:27,28). Jesus is not speaking about anything that will take place in hell some time after Judgment Day, but is referring to that day itself, and to the tremendous change which it will usher in.

Also the word *restitution* (in Acts 3:21) does not refer to any change in hell, but to the redemption of which “God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”

We look at one more argument. They point to passages which say that all things will be put under Jesus’ feet. Read, for instance, I Cor. 15:27, 28; Eph. 1:10, and others. We print out in full Phil. 2:9–11: “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.” — Now it is true, here things under the earth are mentioned. These people will also bow the knee and will confess that Jesus is the Lord. The question, however, still remains: will they do it of their own accord in faith? or will they be forced to do it against their will? We do not have to guess at the answer, the second Psalm answers the question for us. The Psalm sings about the King whom the Lord has set upon His holy hill of Zion. All people will have to acknowledge Him; but they will do so in a different spirit. About some the Psalmist says: “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel” (v.9). About others he sings: “Blessed are all they that put their trust in him” (v. 12).

In concluding this part of our study we add one thought. Damnation in hell will be as endless as will be life in heaven. If eternal damnation is denied, then also eternal life is made doubtful. Think of the closing verse in Jesus' description of the final judgment: "And these shall go away into *everlasting* punishment; but the righteous into life *eternal*" (Matt. 25:46). Both run parallel. (Read also Matt. 3:12; John 3:36; Dan. 12:2.)

So far we have studied only some more or less external questions about hell. But what will hell itself be like?



We concluded our last study with the question, What will hell be like? For our warning of the seriousness of the matter, let us listen to some statements of the Scriptures.

The Nature of Damnation

In a summary way it can be said that damnation will be a separation from God. Note the words that Jesus will use in announcing His judgment on the last day. He will say: "*Depart from me*, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). — When Jesus rejoiced about the faith of the centurion at Capernaum and took his case as a token of many souls to be gained from among the Gentiles, He complained about the lack of faith among Israel: "But the children of the kingdom *shall be cast out* into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:12). Such expressions as "depart" and "be cast out" occur quite frequently. They indicate that the condemned will be separated from God.

But is that so bad? Are there not many people who wish that there were no God? Do they not turn their back on God, try to forget and live without God? And does it not frequently seem as though such people were more prosperous than God's faithful children? So it may seem. But let us not forget, they are not yet separated from God. They have deserted God, but He has not yet deserted them.

Remember, they are still living on earth. This is God's earth. He has created it. He preserves it: the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. St. Paul reminded the blind idol-servers at Lystra that God "left not himself without witness, in that *he did good*, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts *with food and gladness*" (Acts 14:17). Yes, as Jesus says: God "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). Yes, also those people who want nothing to do with God and who think that they have separated themselves from Him, still live only by the blessing of the Lord. He gives them food and drink and clothing for their body; He preserves their health and protects them from injury and harm and pain; He grants a certain peace and joy to their hearts, so that they are not consumed by the terrors of anguish and despair. It is, as Paul summarized it in his great address on Mars Hill in Athens: "In him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Let God withdraw His hand, and they would soon change their tune. Then they would realize that without God's protecting hand their body would be racked with unspeakable pain, and their soul tortured with excruciating agony. Look at Jesus Himself when He hung on the cross forsaken by God! Yet He clung to His God and rescued His soul out of the pains of hell.

What it means to be separated from God is expressed in the Scriptures by such terms as damnation, death, destruction, and the like. In sending His Gospel into all the world Jesus said that "he that believeth not shall be *damned*" (Mark 16:16). To the Jews He said that on the last day "they that have done evil" shall come forth "unto the resurrection of *damnation*" (John 5:29). Heb. 10:27 speaks of a "fearful looking for of *judgment* and *fiery indignation*, which shall devour the adversaries." Damnation is such a terrible thing that to be crushed by a mountain will seem like a boon by comparison. To the weeping women at Jerusalem Jesus said that when judgment will come to the "dry trees" they will "begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us" (Luke 23:30). The book of Revelation repeats this word. In one of the visions John heard how some people in their extreme anguish "said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him

that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:16, 17).

That is a faint picture of what damnation means.

Death is a very common expression for the condition in hell. Already in Paradise God used the word to indicate what it means to be separated from Him. As long as man stayed with God he had life; but if he would try to break away from God by transgressing His commandment, God said to him, "Thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). And Paul repeats: "The wages of sin is death" (Rom, 6:23).

Since what we ordinarily call death is of limited duration, because a resurrection is to follow on the last day, the condition of the damned in hell is called the "second death." The Lord holds out the promise to those who are faithful unto the end: "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" (Rev. 2:11). Again: "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6). The same chapter describes the second death for us thus: They "were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death" (v. 14). This description is repeated in the next chapter. Speaking about the unbelievers, who persist in their sins, it says: They "shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev. 21:8).

If we bear this description in mind we can readily understand why damnation in hell is called "destruction." In warning against the "broad way" and the "wide gate," Jesus says that it "leadeth to destruction" (Matt. 7:13). Paul calls it a "sudden destruction," which they upon whom it will come "shall not escape" (I Thess. 5:3). Rather, they "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (II Thess. 1:9). Note how he here combines the idea of destruction with that of separation from the Lord.

We list one more passage, in which Paul pleads with us to resist the lures of deceitful riches: "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition" (I Tim. 6:9).

This should be sufficient to warn us of the seriousness of hell. But Scripture has much more to say on this point, which we shall, God willing, take up in some future studies.



In our study of the nature of conditions in hell we noted some general expressions, such as separation from God, death, condemnation, destruction. God in His faithful warnings gives us many more.

Today you hear and read much about "understatements." They are statements which sound rather mild in their wording, but have the effect of a very strong and impressive denunciation. Thus, when it is said about someone that he is not known for honesty, you sense at once that he must be a dirty crook.—To impress on our hearts the terrors of hell, Scripture sometimes also makes use of understatements. Think of Ps. 1:5, "Therefore the ungodly *shall not stand* in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." This does not sound very bad but the next verse adds the explanation: "For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly *shall perish*." Note a similar statement in Ps. 5:5, "The foolish shall *not stand* in thy sight: thou *hatest* all workers of iniquity."

Another understatement is used by Isaiah. We know how he rejoices in the *peace* which the Savior prepared for us. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (chap. 53:5). He complains about the ungodly: "The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace" (chap. 59:8). And twice he briefly says: "There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked" (chap. 48:22; 57:21). They shall forever have torment and destruction.

We list also the expression about "not entering into the Lord's rest," which we find in Ps. 95:11, and which the Epistle to the Hebrews discusses at length in chap. 3:7 – 4:11. The Psalm passage reads: "Unto whom

I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.” That is to say that endless fear and trembling awaits them.

On the other hand, besides such understatement Scripture uses also very strong positive language in describing the terrors of hell. At the judgment the Son of Man will send His angels to gather them which do iniquity, and they “shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 13:42). What a gruesome picture! — The condition of the rich man in hell is stated in these words: “being in torments” (Luke 16:23). He complains: “I am tormented in this flame” and pleads that something special be done for his brothers, “lest they also come into this place of torment” (Luke 16:24, 28). Abraham confirms all this by saying: “Thou art tormented” (v. 25). What terrible torment, if even a drop of water would be considered as a great relief!

St. Paul speaks of tribulation and anguish, the actual evil which is inflicted and the feeling of pain which it produces. Rom. 2:9, “Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.” By way of contrast he speaks of the heavenly “glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good” (v. 10).

In the Book of Revelation, John heard a “third angel” announce about everyone who worships “the beast and his image” that he “shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture (that is, undiluted) into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone.... And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night” (chap. 14:9–11).

The Intensity of the Pain

All the passages that we studied so far on the nature of hell clearly show that hell is nothing to trifle with, nothing to be taken lightly, or to jest about. It is most serious. We shall now turn our attention directly to the severity of the physical pain and mental anguish, as the Scriptures picture this to us.

Jesus, on various occasions, calls it “outer darkness,” for instance Matt. 8:12. When we today speak of light and darkness figuratively, we usually understand knowledge and insight by the former, and ignorance by the latter. The Scriptures go deeper. By light they usually mean joy and hope, while darkness means gloom, fear, anguish, or despair. “Outer darkness” then indicates that in hell there is no hope, but extreme anguish, extreme pain. All the tortures that human cruelty has ever invented will pale into insignificance by comparison. Such will be the terrors of this self-incurred separation of the unbelievers from God. It will result in never-ending “wailing and gnashing of teeth.” Men will be tormented by their own consciences, which will condemn them as having brought the situation on themselves. God sent His only Son to redeem them, and sent His Holy Spirit to create faith in their hearts, but they were stiff-necked, they stopped their ears and hearts, and refused to believe. Now they must suffer in outer darkness, self-condemned. In Matt. 13:50, Jesus substitutes for outer darkness the expression “furnace of fire.” The stress on the intensity is the same.

Think of the term “death,” which we met on several occasions. We now look at a few passages which paint a lurid picture of this death. Death here does not denote a state of simple lifelessness, as though the person who formerly existed has passed out of existence and is no more. No, it means a very painful, but never-ending process; not a gentle falling asleep, but a struggle which racks the body and rends the mind, so that a state of death would appear as welcome relief. So the Revelation of John pictures hell. In chap. 6:16,17, we read: “And (they) said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?” And chap. 9:6, adds the thought: “And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.” This is taken from a description of the plague announced by the fifth angel. If such plagues were inflicted on earth, what will the end be like?

May God in His grace preserve us from such torment.



We spent some time in studying what the Scriptures say about the intensity of the pain and anguish in hell, but we reserved two expressions for a special study. They are the *unquenchable fire* and the *never-dying worm*. Very much could be said about these terms, and particularly about the efforts of church teachers to grasp and present their full meaning; but we shall try to be brief.

First we list a number of passages in which these terms occur.

Speaking about the new heaven and the new earth, begun by the redemptive work of Jesus, to be completed on Judgment Day, the Prophet Isaiah describes the sanctified life of God's children on this new earth in terms taken from Old Testament institutions: "And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord" (chap. 66:23). The unbelievers will not disturb them anymore. In the next verse the Prophet describes what will happen to them. This is the last verse of his book: "And they (the blessed believers) shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh."

There was in Jerusalem the glorious temple building with its solemn joyful festivals and there was at the southern limits of the city, just outside the wall, the valley of Hinnom, where a fire was kept burning constantly to dispose of rubbish and offal and the carcasses of animals. What a contrast! The Jews were familiar with the situation, the one place signified to them divine purity, the other the height of disgusting impurity and destruction. This contrast was used by the Prophet to impress on his readers the glories of heaven and the horrors of hell. We must view the term "unquenchable fire" on this background.

Jesus, warning against offenses — whether the offense comes from the hand, or from the foot, or from the eye — says that it is better to cut off hand or foot, and to pluck out the eye, than by sparing the offending member to "go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:42–48).

John the Baptist also mentioned the unquenchable fire. He preached repentance, and admonished his hearers to be sincere about it; the mere fact that Abraham is their father will benefit them nothing if they do not by their fruits give evidence of the genuineness of their repentance. "And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth forth not good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." A mightier one than John is coming after him, "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:7–12).

When we read these passages we cannot escape being impressed with the seriousness of the matter. We are confronted with a tremendous EITHER — OR. There is the great alternative, which leaves no room for any other possibility. There is heaven on the one hand with all its bliss, and there is hell on the other with all its horrors. Now is the time of decision, after death it will be too late, as Solomon spoke about this either — or. "If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be" (Eccles. 11:3). Now, while we have this life, now is the time of preparation, now is the time of grace. Let us not waste it.

Here again we may observe the wiles of the devil. Whenever God brings His Word to our hearts, and in the Gospel makes His Word sweeter than honey, or makes it more bitter than gall in the Law, the devil will try to take it away from us, or divert our attention away from the serious truths which God is trying to plant into our hearts. So also here. Men begin to ask curious questions: what kind of worm is it that will never die? what kind of fire is it that cannot be quenched? They ask, Are the worm and the fire to be understood literally or figuratively?

There are some who insist that worm and fire must be understood in the literal sense, and they adduce laborious arguments to support their contention. There are others who insist just as unbendingly that these terms must be understood figuratively, and they also argue vehemently for their view. It would be a waste of time to review all their arguments here. To such wranglers we would rather say, Whether literal or whether figuratively, there will be a "worm" and a "fire," there will be torments and agony, there will be excruciating pain of body and soul. Redeem the time of grace while you still have the opportunity, and make your escape before it is too late.

We remember that conditions here on earth are different from the conditions in the hereafter. There is nothing here on earth that would correspond exactly to the instruments of torture, fire and worm, as they will be applied in hell. Here we have no undying worm, nor an unquenchable fire. Here fire and worms can harm only our bodies, they cannot touch the soul. But that does not mean that God could not create them, if He saw fit. That simply is not the point. No one dare question God's unlimited ability and power. The question here is, What terrible truth does God want to impress upon our hearts with these terms of "undying worm" and "unquenchable fire"? How are these words used? — In the passages quoted above, John the Baptist is without doubt speaking figuratively. He compares believers to fruitful trees, and unbelievers to unfruitful ones. Then he speaks of an "ax" for the unbelievers. Next he compares believers to "wheat" and the unbelievers to "chaff", and in that connection he speaks of "fire." Thus he chooses his terms as they fit his figure.

One of the great theologians of our Lutheran Church, Johann Gerhard (who died in 1637 —not to be confused with the poet Paul Gerhardt), after reviewing the various opinions and arguments for both the literal and the figurative understanding of "worm" and "fire," concluded with the prayer: "We pray God earnestly that He never reveal this matter to us through the knowledge of experience."



The most important question still remains: What is the cause of hell punishment? Or, in other words, How may hell and damnation be avoided?

Is the cause for damnation to be sought in a deficiency of God's grace? Perhaps the grace of God has its limitations? He is ready to forgive a certain number of sins, but if anyone keeps on sinning beyond that limit, then the grace of God snaps? Perhaps the grace of God will cover our sins, provided we do not go to extremes but keep our offenses on a lower level? That is the way humans evaluate sins. The theft of a penny is not nearly so serious as would be the theft of millions of dollars. The theft of a penny may be overlooked, it may not disrupt the friendship between men—but millions of dollars, that would be a different thing.

Before God such differences do not exist. He is the creator of all things, and to create a million does not require more or greater effort on His part than to create a mite. It is His holy will that counts. And every sin is a transgression of His will. Thus all sins are alike before Him in gravity. Whether a man commits murder, or neglects to help his brother in need—in both cases he has trampled the holy will of God under foot. To our eyes there may seem to be a difference, but not to God's. If we always remembered this, would we then, for instance, easily neglect to attend divine services in our church without a very compelling reason? Many people may consider it as a far smaller sin to neglect divine services than to commit murder, but the same God who said, Thou shalt not kill, also said that we should be diligent to hear His word. Every sin, whether men call it great or small, is a violation of God's will.

Is the cause of hell and damnation this that some people overdid their sinning, either committing too many sins or too grievous sins? No, the grace of God is unbounded. It covers every sin of every description of all sinners without exception.

If the damnation of hell were caused by a deficiency of God's grace, then some of the well-known and best-loved Scripture passages would become meaningless. What would become, for instance, of John 3:16: "God so loved the world" — that rotten, sin-corrupted, filthy mass of humanity—"that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever"—yes, whosoever, everyone without exception, no matter how filthy he may be — whosoever "believeth in him should not perish"—should not be condemned to hell—"but have everlasting life"? —That is an all-inclusive promise, without any ifs and buts. That promise tells us plainly that the grace of God extends as far and wide, as high and as deep as sin abounds. Damnation is not due to a lack of God's grace.

The Scriptures are full of passages assuring us similarly of this fact. Think, for instance, of I Tim. 1:15: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" — not some, not such as committed only comparatively few sins, or small sins, but simply sinners, without any qualification— "of whom I am chief." Paul calls himself "chief of sinners" because in his blindness he had

persecuted the Church fanatically, had murdered the Christians in great numbers, and had caused some to forsake their faith and to blaspheme. He, the chief of sinners, he found grace. The grace of God is unlimited.

Listen to one more passage, a passage in which God comforts backsliding Israel about its horrible sins. “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa. 1:18).

No, the grace of God is not too little or too weak. If anyone is condemned to hell he cannot blame it on a lack of grace.

Or are perhaps the means of grace, the Word of God and the Sacraments, not powerful enough to bring all men to repentance and faith? St. Paul says about the Gospel of Christ that it is a power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth (Rom. 1:16), but perhaps its power is not sufficient to win every one. The rich man in hell thought that the power of the Word must be supplemented in some way. He demanded that Lazarus be sent from the dead to warn his unsuspecting brothers. But what did Abraham answer him? “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.” And: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:29,31).

It remains true what Paul wrote to the Romans (chap. 10:17); “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” The Gospel has not lost any of its power. It creates faith.

It is a blasphemous thought to assume that God from the very beginning created some people for eternal damnation. This is the idea held by Calvin and some of his followers. Some of his followers try to soften the thought a little by saying that God did not create people for hell, but that after the fall of Adam had occurred He decreed to save only some in order to demonstrate in their case His great mercy; and to send others to hell to show in them His stern justice.—No, He “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (I Tim. 2:4). Yes, in His efforts to win stubborn sinners and to bring them to faith He often stretches His patience so far that some people think that He is slack. He is not slack; it only seems so to us because we are too impatient. God stretches His mercy because He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Pet. 3:9).

What, then, is the cause of damnation?

Since we really should say a little more on this question than the space at our disposal in the present issue of *The Northwestern Lutheran* will allow, we must defer it to a future study.



What, then, is the cause of damnation? We left this question for a special study.

In a general way the Scriptures tell us that, if a man is lost in hell, he has only himself to blame for it. The fault is entirely his own. God is not to blame. God did not create him so that he must sin and persevere in sin. God did not exclude him from His grace when He sent His only begotten Son into the world to save sinners. God did not omit to put the faith—and life—creating power into the Word of the Gospel for him. Least of all did God in His eternal counsels decree arbitrarily that certain persons should be damned, no matter who they were and how much they tried, nor did He decree that Christ should not die for them and that the Gospel should not touch their hearts effectively. God left nothing—absolutely nothing—undone to save each and every sinner.— So God can in no way be blamed: the blame is altogether on the side of the sinner.

Listen to the strong language of Isaiah: “The show of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for *they have rewarded evil unto themselves*” (chap. 3:9). No comment is needed to set forth the meaning of these charges. The people brought their punishment upon themselves.

Jeremiah is just as clear and just as emphatic in his denunciation of the sinners’ guilt. “Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts” (chap. 2:19).

There is one passage which Luther often cited and which our Confessions stress as expressing both sides of the question: on the one hand, that our salvation is a pure gift of the grace of God alone without any contribution from us, or supplement by our merits; and on the other, that a man's condemnation is due to his own fault alone, without any deficiency on the part of God or His grace. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help" (Hos. 13:9).

But not only in such general statements is the fault for a man's condemnation laid at his own feet, Scripture goes into some details regarding the matter.

Christ died for all men, no one excluded, not even a Judas Iscariot. Jesus' death was the propitiation for every man's sins. Through His death reconciliation was achieved for every sinner. When God raised Jesus from the dead, He thereby proclaimed before all the world that the guilt of all men, of every individual sinner, had been canceled. He declared every sinner righteous in His sight.

This pertained not only to those who would eventually come to faith, but to all men without exception, also to those who will subsequently go to eternal damnation in hell.

St. John writes: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (I John 2:1,2). Note how John stresses the all-inclusiveness of the work of Jesus, covering not only the believers, but in just the same measure the whole world. — St. Peter says expressly that the work of Jesus covered even those who deny the Lord that bought them. Speaking about false teachers he uses these words: they are "denymg the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction" (II Peter 2:1).

Here an objection is raised: If God already in the resurrection of Christ declared every sinner righteous, how can He on Judgment Day condemn them? Does He take back His original judgment of justification?

The matter is something like this. On Good Friday and Easter, Jesus stepped between us and God, and God looked at the world, at every sinner, through Christ. Christ's blood screened out all their sins, and they appeared before Gods eyes in sparkling holiness. But they do not want to be looked at through Christ. They want to stand on their own merits. Peter says, they *deny* the Lord who bought them. They throw the justification of God away. Their sins did not condemn them; they were washed away in the blood of Jesus. Now their unbelief condemns them.

Jesus spoke about this in His interview with Nicodemus. "He that believeth on him the Son of God) is not condemned (literally— not judged at all): but he that believeth not is condemned (judged) already because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation (judgment), that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:18, 19). — And again in the last verse of the chapter: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

What does it mean that they refuse to believe in Jesus? Jesus summed it up in connection with the healing of the man born blind: "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your *sin remaineth*" (John 9:41). Since they reject the justification through Christ, and want to stand on their own merits, their sin remains, they have no redemption. The redemption which God provided for them they threw away in unbelief. Their damnation is a foregone conclusion.

Now two things can be said about them: they are condemned to hell because of their unbelief — or because of their sins, the forgiveness of which they rejected. Paul combines both statements into one in Eph. 5:6: "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for *because of these* things (the sins which he mentioned in verses 3–5) cometh the wrath of God upon the *children of disobedience* (that is, unbelief)."

That, so the Scriptures warn us, is the cause of condemnation to hell.



The study of what the Scriptures have to say about hell is not a pleasant thing. The pain, the agony, the torments of hell are too horrible. But why then study the matter? Would it not be better to pass it over in

silence?—There are people who consider themselves to be very humane, who denounce the mere mentioning of hell as highly improper. They say that you must not scare people in that way.

But our Old Adam needs scaring, and even so he does not pay attention to the threats of the Law, and God must use the club of pain and suffering on him. Because of our Old Adam the Scriptures present also the doctrine of hell. Else he would deceive us. Let us then take the matter to heart and use it against our unruly Old Adam. The doctrine is revealed as a warning, in order that we may be spared the painful experience.

God had something to say to the Prophet Ezekiel about suppressing unpleasant truths: “If the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman’s hand. So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou lost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand” (chap. 33:6 8).

Having heard God’s serious warning about hell, and taking it to heart, we now turn to see what the Scriptures tell us about the eternal abode of believers.

Heavenly Bliss

In listening to the glowing terms in which the Scriptures picture to us the happiness of heaven, we remember that it will be an entirely new heaven and a new earth. Conditions there will be of such a nature as we never experience here on earth. To mention just one thing: Jesus says that there will be no family life in heaven. There they neither marry nor are given in marriage. Human society could not exist without family life. The family is the basic unit of all society, of the local community, of the state. We all see what troubles follow when family life deteriorates. What society will be like when family life is eliminated is beyond our conception. Yet in heaven there will be no marriages; neither will there be any births, and we may add, there will be no funerals either.

In order to give us some idea of the unspeakable happiness in the entirely new and different surroundings in heaven, the Scriptures refer to pleasant things and pleasurable experiences on earth, comparing the joys of heaven to them.

Life.—One idea that is used time and again is *life*, life in the fullest sense of the word, a healthy and vigorous life of the resurrected body, and a peaceful, contented, happy life of the soul and heart; simply life, an unalloyed life.

In speaking of the resurrection Daniel says that people “shall awake, some to *everlasting life*, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (chap. 12:2). Note the contrast in this passage: the life of which the Prophet is speaking is the very opposite of shame and contempt, it will be free of any trace of shame and contempt, it cannot be touched by them, it would shed them as a goose sheds water.—Matt. 7:13,14 speaks of the wide and the narrow gate, the one leading to destruction, the other “unto life.”—Matt. 18:8,9 opposes life to everlasting fire, while Matt. 25:46 opposes it to everlasting punishment. — Every one of us is familiar with John 3:16, where the believer is promised that he shall “not perish, but have everlasting life.” — In John 5:24 the contrast is between condemnation and death on the one hand, and life on the other. “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation (literally, judgment) but is passed from death unto life.” — In the Gospel of St. John, Jesus often speaks about “eternal life.” (Compare, for instance, chap. 5:29, 6:27, 40, 54.) And in His high priestly prayer (chap. 17:3) He describes it thus: “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.”

It would carry us too far merely to list all passages which speak of heaven as the state of life. We mention only a few more. Rom. 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through

Jesus Christ our Lord.” — Jas. 1:12: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the *crown of life*, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”

In the above passages the noun *life* occurred in various combinations; there are also passages in which the verb to *live* is used. Ezek 33:11: “Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and *live*: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”— John 11:25: “Jesus said unto her (Martha), I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead (that is, though he die). *Yet shall he live.*” “—Christ (that is, since we died with Christ) we believe that we shall also live with him.”

Life! What a wonderful and glorious experience that will be! What is our present life? What is our natural life but a gradual sinking into the grave? From the moment that we were born we carried the germ of death in our system. And no matter how healthy and how strong we may be, it is only a question of time when our life will come to an end. And what is our spiritual life, our faith in God and our love toward God and toward our fellow men? We know to what terrific struggles and temptations our life is exposed. We know to what low levels our faith, our love, our hope often sink, so that at times we no longer feel its pulse beat. Yet we cling to it: “Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life” (Job 2:4). — All of such imperfections will disappear in heaven. What joy to know that heaven will be life!



LUTHER ON ETERNITY

SINCE this issue of *The Northwestern Lutheran* bears the date of Reformation Sunday, we interrupt our regular series of studies in order to listen to the great Reformer’s testimony on our subject. During his whole career Luther kept his eyes glued on the hereafter. His greatest concern was at all times to have a gracious God. As long as he tried to merit God’s favor with his own works, his heart was troubled by constant fears; but when he grasped the truth that God’s love is free for all sinners, then his heart was filled with joy and gratitude; then he was ready to devote his whole life to the service of God and of his fellow men; then he was ready to face all dangers for Christ, even death, without fear. Then he drew joy and comfort, courage and strength from the thought of the hereafter.

Though devils all the world should fill,
All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill
They shall not overpower us.

Keeping his eyes steadfastly fixed on heaven he sang:
The kingdom ours remaineth.

He could not sing so as long as he tried to work his way into heaven; but afterwards the thought of the hereafter was an everflowing fountain of life for him, which he mentions often in his writings, and which he urges Christians to meditate diligently.

On August 19, 1531, he devoted a whole sermon to this matter, and a long sermon it was, which he based on Tit. 2:13: Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

It is not my intention to translate the sermon in whole or in part, but merely to present some of the thoughts which Luther unfolds and impresses on his hearers in connection with the text, or rather only his remarks on the

Blessed Hope.

A Christian, so Luther says, must consider that he will live not only on the earth, nor remain forever in this world. If he does not in his thoughts and desires and hopes rise to a life beyond this world, then he degrades himself to the level of dumb animals. Animals pursue no higher aims than to fill their stomachs. They are limited to this life. When they are killed, then both their life and their hope come to an end. But a Christian is to look for a better life when this temporal, perishable and short life comes to an end; for then we shall enter into an everlasting, never-ending, heavenly existence, filled with pure joy and blessedness.

To be sure, God has placed us here on earth. Here we must till the ground, plow, sow, plant, reap, spin, stitch, milk cows, work in the kitchen, cook, and keep house, and many other such things. To regulate these matters God has instituted government, arranged family life, and given us our common sense. But it is damnable abuse if we attach our hearts to these things, as did the people in Noah's day: "They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark" (Matt. 24:38). Their life just did not mean a bit more to them than eating and drinking; exactly as with the dumb animals "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die"

A Christian's life must be a waiting for that "blessed hope." How that hope will affect his attitude towards our present life Luther illustrates by adducing I Cor. 7:29–31: "But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away." He referred also to Phil. 3:20, 21: "For our conversation (our citizenship) is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

On the name with which St. Peter calls us in his First Epistle, namely, "strangers and pilgrims" (chap. 2:11), Luther remarks that a stranger will not say, This is my homeland, nor does a pilgrim make preparations for a permanent stay: he takes his meals and nights lodging, always hurrying on toward his home. In like manner we Christians must actually turn our back on this present life.

Luther reminds us that Christ came down from heaven, and was made man, He died on the cross and rose again from death and ascended into heaven, not for the purpose of leaving us here below in pain and misery, much less to leave us under the earth in death and the grave to decay and to be food for worms, but rather, to redeem us from all this and to receive us into His eternal kingdom of glory. —Nor were we baptized and became Christians, nor do we hear the Gospel, just to fill our stomachs, to live in this evil grief-filled world, but in order that we may attain to another, a glorious life. Since we have been reborn to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, we ought to wait for that "blessed hope" joyfully and confidently.

These truths, so Luther warns us, may be easy to preach and to teach, but they are difficult to believe and to practice. Our future life is surer and kept more securely than this present life. But do we fully believe it? Do we adjust our conduct to this faith? Do we really, as it should be, hold on to this present life only with our left hand, so to speak, but with our right hand, yes, with all our soul and heart reach out for the life to come?

Let us then wait for that blessed hope. It was this hope to which we were called by the Gospel, this hope on which we were baptized. Let us use this present life as something which we must leave behind, and "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14).

We look for that Blessed Hope.



HEAVEN

HEAVEN will be life! Not a life that had a feeble beginning and will ultimately fade away; not a life that has to be fed constantly and nourished; not a life that is ever threatened by dangers of accident or disease; not a life that has its many ups and downs, being vigorous in one moment and extremely feeble in the next, understanding clearly in one moment and covered by a dense fog in the next. No, it will simply be life.

Although life in heaven will be different from life as it is conducted on earth, yet Scripture uses many expressions for happy experiences of this life to stimulate our hope for the life to come.

The happiest form of earthly life is the family. Be it ever so humble: there is no place like home. Husband and wife united in mutual love, with children given by God specifically into their hands for nurture and care and rearing as true images of God, children who appreciate their parents' care and gratefully return their love—what a beautiful picture of happy life! Scripture frequently refers to heaven as similar to some form of home life.

When Jesus was about to suffer and die, He comforted His disciples by pointing them to the glorious purpose which He would achieve by His death. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3). Note how He compares heaven to a large house with many convenient rooms. He speaks about Himself as "preparing" the place so that everything *will* be in perfect condition ready for pleasant occupancy. He also emphasizes the happy association which His disciples will there enjoy with Him. All of this will be, not in some strange residence, not in some rented quarters, but in His Father's house. Who is His Father? It is the same One whom He on other occasions called "my Father and your Father" (John 20:17), and to whom He taught us to pray: "Our Father, who art in heaven." Since the Father in heaven is Jesus' Father and our Father, Jesus does not hesitate to call us His own "brethren" (Matt. 28:10).

It is true, we do not see anything of this beauty as yet. We have not yet reached our home. We are "strangers and pilgrims" on earth (I Pet. 2:11). "Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb. 13:14). Let us then not be disturbed by the inconveniences and difficulties and pains of our pilgrimage; let us rather draw strength and hope from the prospects of the beautiful home that awaits us at the end of the journey. Paul did just that. He certainly had no easy life, but he lifted his eyes away from the things which he daily saw and felt in his body, to the things which then did not yet appear. He compared his sojourn on earth to a nomad's tent life, tenting here today, pulling up stakes tomorrow to pitch a tent somewhere else. He calls this unsteady life of his "our earthly house of this tabernacle" (II Cor. 5:1). He is willing to endure this troublesome and hazardous life, knowing that he already owns "a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." He had a desire to depart this life and to be at home with Christ (Phil. 1:23) in the mansions in the Father's grand house, which Jesus through suffering and death had gone to prepare for us. Jesus taught us even to use the mammon of unrighteousness to gain friends who with their testimony and with their prayers will receive us into "everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9).

Jesus said that we shall be with Him in His Father's house as His "brethren." He is the "firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). At this point we are not yet speaking about the fact that, if we are Christ's brethren, then we will also be "heirs" as He is, "Joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). We reserve a consideration of heaven as an inheritance for a later study. At present we are interested in the family relations as they are suggested by comparing heaven with a house. We shall associate with Christ as our Brother. There will be others in heaven who have gone before us. What will be our relation to them? Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are mentioned at different times, and pleasures are pointed out which we shall enjoy in their company. Again we must defer most of this to a later time. We now single out Abraham. Heaven is called "Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22): Lazarus was carried by the angels into "Abraham's bosom." What does that mean? Specifically if we are to think of heaven as a home of many brethren under one Father? Abraham points some of it out in his words to the rich man: "Remember that ... Lazarus (received) evil things (in his lifetime), but now he is comforted" (v. 25). What a rich word: "comforted"! Think of a big brother or sister tenderly consoling a little

brother who has hurt himself. In a similar way Abraham is dealing with Lazarus, who has come out of much tribulation.

We noted a few places above in which the idea of a family home is expanded into a home city. It is for all practical purposes the same figure. We can hardly imagine a family of millions and millions of brothers and sisters; it is easier to think of a city or a fatherland with so many inhabitants.

There are other figures which convey the same idea of comfort and safety. When John the Baptist compared the believers to wheat, then he called their home a “garner,” into which they are gathered (Matt. 3:12; Luke 3:17). Jesus used the same idea in one of His parables, Matt. 13:30.

To set forth the beauty of our future home it is frequently called “heaven.” St. Paul once had a wonderful vision. He was snatched up into “third heaven,” where he saw and heard wonderful things, words which he was unable to repeat (II Cor. 12:1–15). We bear this in mind when Jesus reminds us that our Father is “in heaven,” and then instructs us to look to heaven for a place of rest and refreshment. Compare Matt. 5:12; Mark 10:21.

The paradise which God created for Adam and Eve was a wonderful place. It was lost through our fall into sin. Heaven now is called paradise. Paul used the term in describing his wonderful vision. And Jesus used it in His promise to the penitent malefactor: “Verily, I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).



Heaven is presented to us in many passages as our happy home, either as a family residence, or our home town, or our home country. As we are happy to be with our family, or our countrymen, so will we be happy in heaven. The happiness of home life here on earth is only a faint foretaste of the joys that await us in heaven.

Scripture, in addition, uses many other expressions to stimulate our anticipation. It speaks about the kingdom of heaven. “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). On earth we are constantly surrounded by dangers. We are never safe. An accident may strike us at any time. Such is the case since the devil got a foothold on earth, when he seduced Adam and Eve to transgress God’s commandment. By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin. Since all have sinned, death has passed on to all; not one is exempt.

In the text quoted in the previous paragraph, Jesus refers to the “little flock: of His believers. They are not free from the common dangers that threaten all men on earth. Anyone in any place at any time may be struck by some fatal disease. The members of Christ’s “little flock” are not immune. Yes, they are exposed to special dangers. Because by becoming members of Christ’s “little flock” they have renounced the devil, he is especially angry at them. As a hungry lion looking for prey and eager to kill, he now stalks the Christians, trying to do them bodily and spiritual harm. By joining Christ’s “little flock” they have renounced the world with all its pleasure and pretentious vainglory. By this step of theirs they condemn the world with all its vaunted self-righteousness as being guilty of detestable and damnable hypocrisy before God. The world resent this and tries to take revenge.

In heaven things will be different. Jesus calls it the “kingdom.” God is King also here on earth, it is true, and Jesus Himself is even now sitting at His Father’s right hand and ruling in the midst of His enemies. But the enemies are still here also, threatening us. From heaven they will be excluded completely. There God will richly provide for His citizens and bless them, without danger of interference from any enemy.

What a grand prospect, what a happy hope, that the loving God will be our King, who without let or hindrance will shower His blessings on us!

Yes, the words imply even more. We shall not be ordinary citizens in God’s kingdom of heaven, we shall join God in His rule. Note that Jesus speaks about “giving” us the kingdom. We shall not only be permitted to enter it, but actually to share it. It is true, we Christians are called kings also here on earth. Sin may tempt us, but it cannot dominate us. We are kings. We are under grace, and in the power of Christ’s grace we

are able to take up the fight against sin, and lead a God-pleasing life in spite of the temptations. We are under grace, and in the power of Christ's grace we can resist the devil, and he will flee from us, yes, we can tread him under foot. Yet, our kingdom here is not an unbroken enjoyment of serene peace. We have daily battles on our hands; and although the power of Christ's grace is far superior to the devil's might and guile, yet we frequently suffer a setback and maintain our kingship only with great difficulty. That will be different in heaven. There it will be a kingdom unhampered and undisturbed.

To get a closer view of this kingdom we look at the words of Jesus with which He will turn over the kingdom to us. In describing the final judgment to us He says: "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). We note that He asks us to "inherit" the kingdom. He declares that it is ours according to the right of inheritance. Remember, we are children of God. And if children, then heirs, God's heirs and joint-heirs with Christ. God is King, and our inheritance is His kingdom. If that is the case, shall we then not be ready to suffer a little with Christ? Remember that He "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). Jesus did not seek and personal advantage by His sufferings. The "joy that was set before Him" was the prospect that by His sufferings He would save us from death and hell; He would sit at the right hand of God and rule over all things in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth for our benefit, that nothing might harm us. And to gain this joy of saving us, He was ready to suffer death and the agony of hell, and He disregarded the shame of such humiliation. He achieved His purpose: shall we now hesitate to take up our cross and follow Him? Will not the most severe suffering in this life, though it linger on for years, seem light and fleeting by comparison with the eternal weight of glory that awaits us in heaven, when we inherit the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world?

Christ proclaims His kingdom in the Gospel. On earth it is a kingdom of the cross, but in heaven it will be a kingdom of glory. In the hope of inheriting this kingdom Paul was ready to lay down his life for Christ: "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom" (II Tim. 4:18). We join him in the words of Heb. 12:28: "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace (that is, let us give thanks), whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."



When this issue of *The Northwestern Lutheran* reaches our readers we shall be pretty well along in the Advent season. Our eyes are turned toward Bethlehem and to the wonderful gift of God for the world in the incarnation of His Son. Heavens doors had been closed to us by our sin. Jesus came to open them again. — For Reformation Sunday we interrupted our regular series of studies in order to hear the great Reformer speak to us on the importance of eternity for our Christian faith and life. At this time we shall not interrupt our series, but we shall take a special look at the Christmas event in relation to our hope of heaven, or also the other way around, we shall look at heaven in the light of the Christmas story.

In the prayer which our Lord Himself taught us to pray, the word heaven occurs twice, in the Introduction and in the Third Petition. In our study today we take our clue from the Introduction, where Jesus teaches us to address God as "Our Father who art *in heaven*."

The heavens as we see them in a starlit night or on a sunny day, or when covered with storm-tossed clouds, or shooting streaks of lightning followed by loud thunderclaps, whether we look at the heavens with our naked eyes or reenforced with the most powerful telescopes—the heavens are wonderful and awe-inspiring to behold. They are the handiwork of God and proclaim the glory of their Maker, His eternal power and godhead. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork" (Ps. 19:1).

Is this the heaven where God resides? Is this the heaven which Jesus had in mind when He taught us to pray: "Our Father who art in heaven"? No, to imagine that the sky, the firmament, the heaven which the astronomer explores with his telescope is the house of God our Father, would be robbing God of His glory. In a majestic figure the Prophet Isaiah declares: "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my

footstool” (Isa. 66:1). In comparison with the greatness and the majesty of God the vast expanse of the heavens is but like a small seat on which He rests. — When King Solomon dedicated the temple which he had erected to the glory of God’s name, he humbly confessed in his prayer: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have built?” (I Kings 8:27. See also 11 Chron. 6:18.) —The Psalmists echo this truth. See, for instance, Ps. 89:11: “The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them.” And Paul warned the philosophers in Athens that their efforts to serve God in shrines and with sacrifices and libations were merely a sign of gross ignorance: “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshiped with men’s hands, as though he needed anything” (Acts 17:24,25).

No, the heaven that we see with our eyes, although it is immense and glorious, is not the proper abode of our God. And even if it were possible to construct another heaven over the present heaven, and proportionately greater than the present heaven by as much as the present heaven exceeds and excels the earth, it would still be too small to serve as a proper abode for God.

Yet Jesus tells us to address God as our Father in heaven. — There are many passages in the Old Testament which speak of God in a similar way, linking our prayers to His abode in heaven. We list a few at random. Already Moses prayed: “Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless thy people Israel, and the land which thou hast given us” (Deut. 26:15). In the dedicatory prayer of Solomon, to which we referred above, the following petition occurs: “Hear thou in heaven, thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive” (I Kings 8:30. See also verses 43–49; also a number of verses in II Chron. 6—the verses 21, 27, 30, 33, 35, 39— which all say that God hears our prayers “from heaven”). I Chron. 21:26 tells us that David built an altar to the Lord, bringing sacrifices and calling on the Lord; “and he answered him from heaven by fire.” The Psalmist sings: “Now know I that the Lord saveth his anointed; he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand” (20:6). Other passages might be added, but let these suffice.

With the word “in heaven” Jesus wants to remind us of the glory and power and majesty of our God. Think of a passage like Ps. 115:3. The heathen make much of their idols. They build magnificent temples for them and erect costly monuments to their name. But what can these idols do for their worshipers, what help do they give them? None whatever. They are blind and deaf and dumb. “But,” so the Psalm continues, “our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.” That is the God to whom we pray. — But what if the world hates us and tries to harm us? They hate God also. They rebel against Him and His Anointed, against His Christ. What will the Lord do about it? Will they not destroy His kingdom? He is not worried, He sits in the heavens. “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision” (Ps. 2:4). Let us remember this every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer, and address God as our Father in heaven.

Jesus teaches us to call Him Father. Dare we? Is not He who sits in the heavens our Judge? Do not our sins separate us from Him? Will He not in holy wrath condemn us because of our sins? Listen to what Isaiah says: “Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (chap. 57:15). The mighty One, the glorious One, who dwells in the highest heaven, has sent His only-begotten Son to earth to open, by His suffering and death, heaven again to us, so that He can again come to us and take up His abode in our trembling hearts, and we can send acceptable prayers up to His throne.

About this opening of heaven by Jesus a little more in our Christmas study, God granting us His grace.



The Christmas story reminds us very vividly of heaven. There was the heavenly messenger who announced to the startled shepherds the birth of the Savior, and then there came the heavenly hosts who sang: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” They shouted their joy at the birth of the Savior. His birth meant much to them also. As they rejoice over the sinner who repents, so at Bethlehem

they sang for joy that the fulness of time had come when the salvation of sinners was to be prepared. — After finishing their song they returned to heaven.

In our previous study for the Advent season we took our clue from the Introduction to the Lord's Prayer, where Jesus teaches us to address our requests to God as our Father in heaven. For our Christmas study we turn to the Third Petition: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." In this petition Jesus brings heaven and earth together. He links God's praying children on earth to His holy ministers whose home is the glorious heaven itself. They belong together: together they are to praise God. So it was at the beginning. But this happy relation had been disturbed by sin. Sin had separated men from their God; it had also broken the bonds that united them with the angels. This breach is now to be healed by Jesus, and the original fellowship is to be restored.

The Third Petition presupposes that the angels in heaven are doing the will of God. They delight to do it. They ever stand ready to do God's bidding. No assignment is distasteful to them. Although they are grieved by our sins, yet they are ever willing to serve us. Jesus asks us to take the angels' obedience for our pattern, that from them we learn to do God's will with gladness, yes, that we join hands with them and as one great family of God show forth His glory.

The angels pitied man from the time of our fall. They rejoiced that God planned our salvation. When He announced our salvation through the Prophets, the angels studied these prophecies even more eagerly than did the people to whom they were given and who were most directly involved. Peter, speaking about these prophecies and their fulfillment in Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel, adds: "Which things the angels desire to look into" (I Peter 1:12). They showed their great interest in Bethlehem, and they have not lost any of it yet. Whenever a sinner repents they rejoice. They watch over the progress of the Gospel in the world and admire the wisdom of God, as Paul reminds us. Speaking about his own ministry, that he was preaching among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and that he led men into the fellowship of Christ, he adds: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10).

In I Cor. 11 he speaks about the proper way of conducting our services, particularly about the modesty which it is fitting for women to exercise. Then he adds that we should observe such rules "because of the angels" (v. 10). When we hold our services, the angels take part and rejoice with us; but they are grieved when they see us behaving improperly.

The Third Petition assumes that God's children on earth and the angels in heaven are united. This was brought about by Jesus. In Eph. 1 Paul refers to this in a general way: "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he (God) might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him" (v. 10). In Colossians he pictures the greatness of Christ: He is the "image of the invisible God," He "is before all things," all things, both visible and invisible, all things in heaven and on earth were created by Him and for Him. And now "it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself, by him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven" (Col. 1:19,20).

Jesus referred to the reunion of heaven and earth not only in the Lord's Prayer; on another occasion He spoke about it in a very solemn way. He had come to John to be baptized and had announced His readiness to fulfill all righteousness. After His baptism He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where He was tempted by Satan for forty days. After Jesus' return from the wilderness John pointed Him out as the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Then several of John's disciples turned to follow Jesus; and they brought also others to Him. Then Jesus started on His way back to Galilee, and just then Philip led Nathanael to Him. Nathanael, as was the custom of pious Jews, had retired to the privacy under a fig tree, there to meditate and to pray. Jesus, who had never met Nathanael before, yet with His all-seeing eye not only saw him under the fig tree praying, but He also looked right into his heart. When Nathanael came near Him He remarked about Him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." Jesus recognized in Nathanael a man who was not looking for an earthly Messiah, but for the true Savior from sin. This insight moved Nathanael to say: "Rabbi,

thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.” He believed in Jesus as the Messiah of whom Moses had written and the Prophets.

On this confession Jesus answered: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven (standing) open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (John 1:5 1). On this flight before his brother Esau, Jacob in a dream had seen a ladder reaching up to heaven with God standing at the head and the angels ascending and descending. That was a dream. Jesus says that in His case that dream will become reality. When Jesus was baptized John saw the heavens opened for a moment, and the Spirit descending. In speaking to Nathanael, Jesus uses a form of the verb which means that the heavens will stand permanently open. The separation between heaven and earth, which was caused by our sin, will be removed, so that the angels can, without hindrance, freely ascend and descend.

He adds, however, that this will be mediated by the “Son of Man,” namely, by the Word which was made flesh, by the promised Seed of the woman. From Him and on Him will the angels ascend and descend. Through Him the heavens have been opened for us also. This is our joy at Christmas:

He opens us again the door
Of paradise today;

The angel guards the gate no more.
To God our thanks we pay.



Only a few days ago we closed the old year and entered a new one. We no longer date our letters and documents as of 1956, we write 1957. It took us a long time to get accustomed to the number 1956; many a time it may have happened that we still wrote the number of the previous year, at least, we had to make a special effort to put in the new number. And now that we have become used to 1956 we must change again. — Time is fleeting, and every year, yes, every day, every hour and every minute brings us closer to the end, to the moment when time will merge into endless eternity.

For us who believe in our Savior, who was born for us on Christmas Day, who on the day of His circumcision received the name Jesus, whose manifestation as Savior, Savior also of the Gentiles, we observe on the date of this issue of *The Northwestern Lutheran*, for us our entry into eternity will be a most joyous experience. In our recent studies we have looked at the joys of heaven from various angles in the light of a number of Scripture passages. Today we shall take our clue from the New Year’s Epistle pericope. It closes with the words: “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and *heirs* according to the promise.” (Gal. 3:29).

Heirs

The Scripture often call us heirs. In the epistle to the Galatians, from which the above quotation was taken, Paul uses the word three times. In the Epistle pericope for the Sunday after Christmas the word occurs twice. There Paul speaks of an heir who is still a *child*. Outwardly there is no difference between him and a servant. He is under the care of a guardian. Paul uses the term “tutors and governors.” Yet in spite of this treatment he is heir, that is, “the lord of all” (Gal. 4:1,2). The pericope closes with the statement: “Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (v.7).

The face that with our adoption as God’s sons we receive also the status of heirs is stated by Paul also in other places. Rom. 8:16,17: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children and heirs by virtue of our justification, which He has granted us in His grace and sealed to us in our baptism. “According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Tit. 3:5–7).

Also James calls the Christians heirs. Although they may be poor in earthly goods, rich people should not look down on them; in spite of their earthly poverty they have a wonderful inheritance awaiting them. “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” (Jas. 2:5).

The Inheritance

It always arouses a feeling of happy anticipation when a person is notified that he has been designated in some one’s last will as an heir to his estate, in whole or in part. This is precisely the feeling which God wants us to have by believing that we are to be heirs of heaven. On earth we are poor, we must endure many privations, we must bear the cross for Jesus’ sake. This is not easy, and we sometimes lose courage. Then, to brace us, God speaks to us about our inheritance.—We here list only a few passages.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians Paul mentions the inheritance several times in glowing terms: “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what *the riches of the glory of his inheritance* in the saints” (chap. 1:18). A few verses before this one he referred to the great pledge which God has given us as security of our inheritance: “After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that *Holy Spirit* of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance” (v. 13, 14). Then he pronounces it as the greatest curse over people who live according to the lusts of the world, namely, that they will be barred from the inheritance. “For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (chap. 5:5).

St. Peter sings the praises of this inheritance: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an *inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away*, reserved in heaven for you” (I Pet. 1:3,4).

How Shall We Live as Heirs of Heaven?

An heir of a rich inheritance is not supposed to live as a pauper. An heir will also carefully avoid everything harmful, so that his inheritance may not be squandered. He will show a lively concern for the estate and will gladly work in its interest.

In one of the passages quoted above Paul calls it an inheritance “in the saints.” When he took leave from the Ephesian elders he encouraged them to take good care of themselves and of their congregation, and warned them against false teachers who might come to them from without or even spring up in their own midst. Then he added: “Now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an *inheritance among all them which are sanctified*” (Acts 20:32). In view of our glorious inheritance let us then strive to lead a life of sanctification, a life worthy of our high calling.

A warning is in place. Let us lead a life of sanctification, but not with the thought that in this way *we merit* our inheritance or make ourselves worthy of it. The inheritance is ours by grace alone. And anyone who tries to work his way into the inheritance, will forfeit it. Paul warns the Galatians: “For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise” (chap. 3:18).

Let us then always rejoice in the promised great inheritance.



We have looked at a number of expressions which the Scriptures use to give us an inkling of the joys that await us in heaven. We have by no means exhausted the list; more of such beautiful terms could be found, but a detailed discussion might cause firing repetitions. For that reason we break off. The term which we considered in our last study, which called heaven our inheritance and thus assured us that we have been appointed as rich heirs certainly rouses thoughts of joyful anticipation and hope in our hearts. Living in this

hope of unspeakable glory, which is preserved for us in heaven as an inheritance “incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away,” will make the pains and anxieties of this life seem light and momentary and insignificant beyond measure by comparison. It will give us the strength to lead a life worthy of so rich an inheritance.

We turn to a few expressions in the Scriptures which, without figure, speak directly of our happiness in heaven. Scripture says that there God will be “all in all,” and that we shall “see God.” These two terms are mutually complementary, emphasizing the idea of complete unhampered and uninterrupted union and communion with our God.

God will be all in all, that is one side of the picture. Think of how St. Paul concludes his presentation of the article on Resurrection. This article was doubted by some in Corinth. Paul shows them that the hope of our resurrection rests on the fact of Jesus’ triumphant resurrection. Through sin Adam brought death into the world. In Adam all die. Then Jesus came into the world, took our guilt upon Himself, and wiped it out by His death. In witness of His success He arose from the grave on the third day. If Christ had not arisen, then would we still be in our sins, and death would be our eternal lot. But Christ, by His resurrection, brought back from His grave the resurrection of us all. “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (I Cor. 15:22).

This will take place in its proper order. On the last day will come the resurrection and the final judgment. That will complete the work of our Savior, the damage done by sin will have been undone. The original bliss will have been restored, so “that God may be all in all” (I Cor. 15:28).

Think what that means. God is the One from whom all blessings flow. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights” (Jas. 1:17). That is true already in this life. But here our intercourse with God is still obstructed by the conditions of sin. Then in heaven, when sin shall have been completely removed, God’s blessings will flow on us in an unimpeded, uninterrupted stream. Then we shall fully appreciate what the Psalmist sings: “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever” (Ps. 73:25,26).

How shall we in heaven become aware of this blessing? And in what manner shall we enjoy it? Here on earth we live by faith, there sight shall take the place of faith. So Paul expresses it in II Cor. 5:7: “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” And St. John says: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (I John 3:2).

Just think what that will mean when we shall see God, and look at Him face to face. Think of the joy it brings to friends who have been separated for a long time when they meet again and look into one another’s eyes. They may have corresponded by mail during their separation, they may have talked with each other by long-distance telephone, they may have exchanged photographs, yet all this was but a poor substitute for seeing each other face to face.

We are now separated from God. Yes, we hear Him speak to us in His Word, and we speak to Him in prayer. But that is, as Paul calls it, like seeing “through a glass darkly.” Then, however, it will be face to face.

God is love. His face is beaming with love, as He instructed Aaron to say in the Benediction: “The Lord *make his face shine* upon thee and be gracious unto thee.” It is always pleasant to look into the smiling face of a friend, to look into God’s smiles will be life eternal. We shall never grow tired of looking at God, rather, that look will constantly refresh us. Both St. Paul and St. John told us in the passages cited above, how much they cherished the hope of seeing God “face to face” and “as He is” in heaven, and they encouraged their readers to do the same. That hope greatly strengthens us even in our present tribulations.

Job is an outstanding example of the power of this hope. Although he was a very pious man, the devil was given the permission by God to attack him with a most serious illness. Job’s friends charged him with secret sins because of his illness; even his wife taunted him about the futility of his trust in God: “Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die” (chap. 2:9). How did Job comfort himself? “I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. and though after my skin worms destroy this body,

yet in my flesh *shall I see God*. whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold, and not another” (chap. 19:25–27).

Jesus directed His disciples to the same fountain of strength and comfort: “Blessed are the poor in heart: *for they shall see God*” (Matt. 5:8). And the author of Hebrews warns against the loss of this hope: “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man *shall see the Lord*” (chap. 12:14). In the last chapter of the Bible the holy seer John is told that this will be the heart of our joy in heaven: “His servants shall save him: and they *shall see his face*; and his name shall be in their foreheads” (Rev. 22:3,4).



The joys of heaven are defined for us in the Scriptures as consisting essentially in this that God, the fountain of all blessings, will be all in all, and that we shall see Him face to face, or just as He is. We shall see Him, no longer as in a glass darkly, no, it will be a direct seeing; we repeat the phrase, face to face. It will be a perfect union and communion between us and our God. Nothing sweeter can be mentioned, or even conceived.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to make positive statements about this heavenly happiness, because there is nothing like it here on earth. Hence the Scriptures use negative terms, mentioning some of the evils which plague us now and with which we are only too familiar, and assuring us that these will be completely absent in heaven. Every trace of them will there have been wiped out. We shall experience perfect freedom.

Scripture in many places speaks about this matter by making the sweeping statement that all enemies will have been subdued and will have been put under Jesus’ feet. Thus in Ps. 110 the Lord invites our Lord: “Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” The Eighth Psalm assures us that “Thou (Lord) hast put all things under his (man’s) feet,” and the Epistle to the Hebrews explains that this promise has been fulfilled in Jesus. First it quotes from the Psalm— “Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownest him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet” (chap. 2:7,8). Then, after saying that “now we see not yet all things put under him” (v. 8), it continues: “But we see Jesus ... for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor” (v. 9). Commenting on these same matters St. Paul says in the great chapter on the resurrection: “For he (Christ) must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet” (I Cor. 15:25–27). Both Paul and the writer of Hebrews have something to say on the extent of that little word “all.” Hebrews says: “In that he put *all* in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him” (chap. 2:8). Paul says: “When he saith *all* things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him” (I Cor. 15:27). It is difficult to grasp this word “all.” Everything that hurts or harms us here, whether great or small, every thing that makes this life in the least unpleasant, everything of this type will have been overcome by Jesus and completely swept away. There will reign complete freedom from harm.

But Scripture speaks about the matter not only in such general, sweeping terms. It mentions some of the evils by name, and assures us that we shall enjoy freedom from them. Heb. 12:1 complains that sin “doth so easily beset us.” The word which our English Bible translates “easily beset” really means, as Luther translated it in his German Bible, that it so “closely clings to us.” Hebrews pleads with us to “lay aside” this sin, and in v. 23 gives us the assurance that we have come “to the general assembly (literally, the grand festival gathering) and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.” That will be a wonderful change: here besmirched with sin, there a festival-gathering of saints.

When Paul was facing martyrdom in Rome he wrote to Timothy about the freedom from sin and guilt which he anticipated in heaven: “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a *crown of righteousness*, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.” He adds: “And not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (II Tim. 4:6–8).

Not only will all guilt have been completely removed, so that we are declared to be entitled to wear a crown of righteousness, but all temptation to sin will also cease.

It is temptation which really makes our present life so difficult. When we came to faith, we were not only assured that we could receive the forgiveness of our sins, we were told that the blood of Jesus, which He shed in His great sin-offering on the cross, had completely wiped out our guilt in the sight of God, so that not a trace, not the slightest trace, of it was left. And not only was this forgiveness sealed to us in our baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and we were invited to bear His name and to call on Him as our Father in heaven: this faith also brought about a change in our heart: our Old Adam was drowned and a new man came forth. It was a new birth, a new creation.

Remember how God created Adam and Eve in paradise. He created them in His own image. They were like Him in glorious holiness and purity. Their thoughts were holy, there was no flaw in them, no impurity, no envy, no pride, no hatred, no doubt or mistrust of God. And so were their words, all dripping with love both toward God and toward their fellow creatures. Likewise all their actions. In them they served God and one another in love. Yes, they bore the image of God. You could tell that they were God's children.

All this was changed in the fall. The likeness of God was lost, and the likeness of the devil was imposed on our hearts. We thought that we were very wise, but our wisdom was turned into foolishness. We had become blind in spiritual things, but we imagined that we could see. And this remained so to the present day. Natural man still thinks that he knows the way to heaven; and what God tells us about the true way, that he condemns as foolishness. He is very cocksure in his blindness; and when God tells him his error and proclaims the truth of the Gospel to him, he becomes angry. In a his thoughts, his words, his deeds he not only dethrones God as his King, he renounces Him also as his heavenly Father and degrades Him to the level of a salesman, with whom he tries to deal on a commercial basis and to drive a sharp bargain. He does not recognize his own sinfulness in all this, but presents his imaginary good works before God and demands a reward. He dishonors God by refusing to consider His blessings as a free gift of His grace, and by refusing to thank Him for them. He claims them as due payment for services rendered. When God withholds them, he charges that God is unfair and grossly lacking in love.

Such is the condition of the natural heart ever since the fall. It is completely self-centered and selfish. When a person comes to faith this is changed. Faith is the victory over this worldly mind. Faith is a new birth, a new creation. By faith the lost image of God is restored. As believers we again begin to think like God, to speak like God, to act like God. We begin to love things that we formerly abhorred, and to abhor things that we formerly relished.

That is the state of our reborn heart. But we are still living in this sin-infested and sin-cursed world. We are surrounded by temptations, which make this life very miserable. That will be changed in heaven. No temptation will reach us there.

In our next study we propose to speak a little on the painfulness of temptation, and on the corresponding happiness which will be ours in heaven where all temptation ceases.



The joys in heaven will include the freedom from temptation. Bodily pain and sickness, also mental anxiety, grief and fear are great afflictions, but they are insignificant by comparison with the woes of temptation, to which a Christian is exposed. A Christian, with the image of God renewed in him, tries to lead a life pleasing to God, and he is happy when he succeeds. He loves the Word of God and gladly hears it. He is happy because at any time, day or night, he may approach God in prayer and pour out his heart before Him. He knows that God pays close attention to his childlike babblings, whether he speaks about his joys or his griefs. A Christian is glad to help his neighbor in need and, especially, to work for the kingdom of God. But temptations ever disturb him and spoil his joy.

There are particularly three sources of temptation, the devil, the world, and our own flesh.

The devil started it all when he tempted our first parents in Paradise, when he led them to doubt God's Word and to set it aside. He there already showed his deep guile and great might, and he is still walking about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

Has it ever happened to you when you were in church, while you were singing with your heart, or while you were joining in the prayers of the congregation, or while you were attentively listening to the sermon and applying the divine truths to your heart, that suddenly you were distracted, and your thoughts wandered off? You were pained because it happened, but you could not explain it. Be sure that the devil was behind it, trying to snatch the seed of God's Word away from you. Or did it ever happen to you that, while you were preparing to make a contribution for God's kingdom in proportion as He had prospered you, and you were happy to make a sizeable donation, then suddenly the thought flashed through your mind: That is too much, better reduce it a little, there will always be an opportunity to give again? You did not know where those miserly thoughts came from to spoil your happiness of giving; but you may be sure that the devil had his hand in shooting that deadly dart into your soul.

Or did it ever happen to you that, while you were quietly rejoicing because God has forgiven you all your sins for Christ's sake and has adopted you as His child, and will at the end receive you into His heaven, then suddenly strong doubts sprang up in your heart: How do I know that it is true? Perhaps there is nothing to it after all? And then this thought made you most miserable. Your previous joys were gone, and uneasiness and fear had taken their place. It was the devil with his old trick: "Yea, hath God said?"

What happiness, then, that in heaven we shall be rid of all temptations from the devil. Although he is now still going about as a roaring lion, he is a defeated enemy, who has lost his kingdom. Jesus overpowered him. He bruised the head of the old serpent. He has stripped him of his armor. He is leading him captive in a triumphal procession, and will at the end cast him into the fire that was prepared for him and his angels. Then at last he will not be permitted to molest us any longer and to disturb our happiness. That will be a glorious freedom which we shall then enjoy.

We now suffer temptations also from the world. Most of these temptations do not come from open hostilities. It is true, it hurts when unbelievers speak evil of us, and try to ruin our reputation. It hurts when they harm us in our work or in our business, or do other damage to us. But much worse are the temptations when the world lures us with its wisdom, with its pleasures, and deceitful treasures. Then it easily happens to us, as it happened to Eve when she looked at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was so pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired. And before she gave it a second thought, she had taken of the fruit and eaten. The allurements of the world are the same to the present day. And oh, how difficult it is to resist, what a bitter struggle it costs; and how it hurts us when we stumble and slip, be it in a burning thought or in actual deed!

What happiness that this will stop in heaven. On the last day Jesus will separate all people, placing the sheep on His right hand and the goats on the left. And that separation will continue forever, after He has taken us to Himself in heaven.

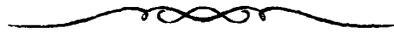
The most dangerous, and also the most painful, temptations assail us from within, from our own heart. All the imaginations of a man's heart are only evil from his youth. Although in our second birth, in our birth from water and the Holy Spirit, we received a new heart, yet also the old one is still present with us till we close our eyes in death. This old heart does not change, nor do its evil lusts ever subside. There is a daily struggle going on within our breast between the flesh and the spirit, often so severe that we doubt our own faith. There seems to be nothing left of it.

Paul speaks about the painfulness of this struggle in Rom. 7. Here are some of his words. "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." But "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." Again: "The good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do." "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Paul was a man of very keen and very tender feeling. Perhaps not every Christian will feel the painfulness of this struggle between his flesh and the spirit as severely as Paul did. But every Christian will undergo the same painful struggle and will suffer from the pain.

What a joy, therefore, that in heaven this struggle will cease. There we shall be all spirit, and no trace of our flesh will be left to trouble us. There our heart will be filled with only pure and lovely thoughts. There we will utter only God-pleasing words, and whatever we may do, we will do with pure joy; and it will proclaim the glory of God.

We quote only a few Scripture passages this time. St. James tells us that instead of battling against temptations in heaven we shall be wearing the crown of victory. “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (Jas. 1:12). And St. Peter encourages us with the following words: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (I Pet. 4:12, 13). We note that instead of “temptations” (the word which St. James has) Peter uses the word “trial,” and for St. James’ “crown” he says “exceeding joy.”

Let us draw strength and courage from these words to stand up bravely in our trials and temptations, in the sure hope that in heaven we shall forever celebrate our triumph.



Living in the presence of God, in the most intimate union and communion with God, seeing Him face to face and basking in the warmth of His loving gaze, completely free from sin, so that we do not even feel its temptations any longer, we shall enjoy perfect happiness in heaven. Since sin itself will be gone, so will also be all the evil results of sin.

We list a few passages, most of which are self-explanatory and do not call for lengthy discussion.

We begin with a promise of our Savior. In speaking of the end of the world to His disciples, He said: “When these things begin to come to pass” — the various signs preceding the end of the world—“then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28). Mark that all-inclusive word “redemption.” Jesus means exactly what He says. All traces of evil will be completely removed and glorious bliss will be restored, as God had originally planned and provided it for us. Christ’s work of redemption will come to its triumphant consummation.

This redemption will apply also to the creatures in general. Since God created the whole world for the sole purpose that it should be the home of man, then, when man by his fall into sin brought a curse upon himself, his fall dragged the whole world into that same curse. The world now is groaning under that burden. But when the final redemption draws nigh for the believers, then also the world will be relieved of its curse to share the redemption of God’s children. “The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly” — it had no choice in the matter—“but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope” — a hope well founded—“because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:19–23). — What a glorious prospect! It will become a reality, because then sin with its ravages will have been completely removed.

That will be a welcome rest, as St Paul calls it in II Thess. 1:6, 7, 10: “Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense ... to you who are troubled *rest* with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, ... 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.”

That will be a glorious victory, an everlasting triumph in endless joyful celebration. “When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, *Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?* ... Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 15:54–57). — We add a few statements from the Book of Revelation— “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any

more; neither shall the sun light on them” —causing a sunstroke — “nor any heat.” “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away” (chap. 7:16; 21:4).

Some Testimony from the Old Testament

Some people think that the hope of resurrection and of eternal life in heaven is a development of the New Testament. They claim that the people of the Old Testament could not have held such advanced ideas. In those days, they say, people had a very gloomy outlook, as though death ended it all. It was only in the course of time that the thought of a hereafter was developed. People did not like to live with such gloomy prospects, and since they wished to have a life hereafter, they began to hope for one and to believe in one.

Now, it is true that the Gentiles to whom St. Paul brought the Gospel were without hope, and the philosophers to whom he preached the resurrection ridiculed the idea as preposterous. Yet the Children of Israel, to whom God revealed Himself through His Prophets, knew full well about the life of heaven with its joys. Several of the passages which we quoted above from the New Testament express our hope in language which they borrowed from the Old Testament. We append a few passages from the book of Isaiah.

“He will swallow up death in victory, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken” (Isa. 25:8). And again: They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them” (Isa. 49:10). Note the similarity of expression with the passages from the New Testament. —This hope filled their hearts with joy and they broke forth into jubilant strains. “Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth, and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted” (Isa. 49:13).

The Joys of Heaven And Our Present Cross

Our hope of heaven caused the Prophets of the Old Testament to break forth into joyful singing of praise to God. Should it do less for us? We must bear the cross. Jesus asks them who wish to come after Him that they take up their cross and follow Him. And St. Paul reminds us that there is no other way to heaven, we must through tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. Shall we grumble and murmur against God when He lays a cross on us? “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18). “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (II Cor. 4:17). Therefore “fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days”—that is a comparatively very short time—“be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (Rev. 2:10, 11). The last promise is an understatement. What God means to say is: that anyone who comes through the sufferings of the present time will in heaven for ever and ever enjoy the most blessed and glorious life.

Let us keep our eye on this promise and from it draw strength and courage and patience and cheer to bear up under the tribulations of this life.



We concluded the previous study with a few remarks about the comforting and strengthening effect which the hope of the joys of heaven must have on us over against the tribulations that befall us here on earth, and the cross which we have to bear, We should simply keep our eyes glued on heaven and rejoice even in the face of the most severe trials. But what do we do? We begin to speculate how it will be possible that we see God. God is a Spirit, and spirits are invisible.

We should not let thoughts of that kind trouble us; least of all should we allow them to disturb our joyful anticipation and the spiritual strength which it gives us. Did not God promise that we shall see Him face to face, and see Him as He is? God is as good as His Word. If God has given us this promise, we can rest assured that He has ways and means of making good His word. So why worry, even if we do not know the answer?

God knows the weakness of our flesh. He knows how the weakness of our flesh often endangers our faith. God, so to speak, went out of His way also in this case by emphasizing some points for our greater assurance. He does not merely say to us, as Jesus once said to Peter, “What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter” (John 13:7). He does more.

A Seeing of God with Our Eyes

We sometimes use the word “to see” in a figurative sense. When someone tries to explain a matter to us, and when we begin to understand, then we may say: It begins to dawn on me; or, I see the point. Some people think that our seeing of God in heaven will be similar. It will be a sort of mental seeing, not a seeing with the eyes.

It is true, with our eyes as they are now constituted we cannot see spirits, nor can we see God. But does that mean that God cannot give us eyes with which we can see spirits? Or is it impossible for Him to change our eyes in such a way that they can perceive a spirit? Think what man has done to improve his vision. How many people do we not meet wearing glasses? Some people are hampered in their vision by myopia. They wear glasses to correct the fault. Others suffer from astigmatism. Again glasses provide a remedy. Some things are so small that no human eye is able to see them. Yet by the aid of microscopes those things are actually seen. Some stars are so far out in the distance that even the keenest of human eyes is unable to reach them. Yet there are telescopes to bring them close to us. If man can so reinforce our eyes, shall we doubt God’s ability so to improve our sight that we can see spirits and see Him?

Some people say that our seeing of God in heaven will be mediated by the human nature of Christ. Christ assumed a human body, which human eyes can see. And thus, they say, we shall see God in heaven because we shall see Christ, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. It is true, we shall see Christ in heaven according to His human nature. He did not leave His human nature behind when He ascended into heaven. When St. Stephen was granted a look into heaven, he saw the glory of God and “the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55, 56). But we shall also see God directly “face to face,” and “as He is.”

The Scriptures speak directly about a change in our bodies on resurrection day. Then Jesus will “change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21). In the great chapter on the resurrection (I Cor. 15), St. Paul calls our resurrection body a spiritual body. “It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (v. 44). “And as we have borne the image of the earthy (Adam), we shall also bear the image of the heavenly” (Christ, v. 49).

Why should it then be impossible for us to see God? The angels see Him, as Jesus tells us. In speaking about the “little ones” and the great care with which we should treat them, He mentions the angels who have been delegated to guard them. He says, “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 18:10). If the angels are so constituted that they behold the face of our heavenly Father, why should God not be able to equip our bodies with a similar eyesight?

We may confidently join Job in his confession: “I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another” (chap. 19:25–27).

Glorifying God

We have already observed in former studies how the seeing of God will fill our hearts with unspeakable joy. See the words of Job just quoted. See what St. Paul says I Cor. 13:12, and St. John in I John 3:2. We add a word of Jesus, with which He comforted His disciples, when He announced to them: “A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father” (John 16:16). He knew that His departure would grieve them: “Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful” (v. 20). How did He comfort them? He said, “Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.... Ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you” (vv. 20 and 22). Seeing Him, being united with Him, this will be our joy in heaven.

Can we then do anything but glorify God for granting us such joy? Can our mouth be silent, can our hands remain inactive? If already here the mere anticipation of the coming joy fills our hearts with patience to bear the cross cheerfully, and imparts strength to our hands to serve the Lord most willingly, what will it be in heaven? The joy of the Israelites who returned from the Babylonian Exile was but a faint shadow of our joy in heaven at seeing God. Jeremiah wrote: “Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord” (chap. 31:12). “Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad”(Ps. 126:2,3).

In the Book of Revelation, John several times records songs of the saints in heaven, which he was privileged to hear in some of his visions. We cite one in which he speaks of the great multitude of people before the throne of God. “After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.... Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God forever and ever. Amen” (Rev. 7:9, 10, 12).

We sing in anticipation:
Oh, that we were there!
May we praise Him there.



In heaven we shall see God face to face as He is. This will be a source of supreme joy. Will God be the only One whom we shall see? Often the question comes to our mind whether in heaven we shall see our relatives and friends. Shall we recognize the people with whom we were associated here? Shall we recognize people who were prominent in the Church on earth? Will they recognize us?

Conversation in Heaven

It is clear that the family relations which exist on earth will not be resumed and continued in heaven. The Sadducees tried to ridicule the idea of a resurrection with their story of the seven brothers who all married the same woman one after the other because they all in order had died childless, from the oldest brother down to the youngest. They even tried to trip up Jesus with this story. They thought the problem could not be solved: whose wife would the woman be, since each one of the seven had been married to her? What did Jesus answer?

He said that the question did not pose any difficulty at all, since it was based on an altogether false assumption. He answered them: “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:29). Then He explained to them: “The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:34–36).

Marriage was instituted by God for this life, for the purpose of increasing the human race and filling the earth. Husband and wife were joined together as father and mother in one family, so that their children might have a home where they could be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In heaven there will be neither births nor deaths among the human race. In this respect all will be equal to the angels. As there is no family life among the angels, neither will there be among the resurrected humans.

We shall recognize our relatives and friends in heaven, but no longer as relatives, as father or mother, or brother or sister, or son or daughter. Jesus says, "They are the children of God." In heaven we shall all together make up one large family with God Himself as the Father.

There will be conversation in heaven. Remember that Jesus compared life in heaven to a banquet: "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 8:11). Banquets are not silent affairs. Whenever Jesus was invited to a meal He carried on a conversation with the host and with the other guests. So will it be also in heaven. The Epistle to the Hebrews compares the life in heaven to a grand festival assembly.

We may in this connection think also of the transfiguration of Jesus, where the three disciples, Peter and James and John, had a foretaste of heaven when Moses and Elias appeared. The three disciples recognized them at once, and then heard them carry on a conversation with Jesus.

When the Thessalonians worried about their departed loved ones, thinking that they might be at a disadvantage when the Lord would return in glory, Paul not only comforted them with the assurance that Christ would not proceed with His kingdom till He had first restored the sleeping believers to life, but he reminded them also that after that preparatory step all the believers, both the ones remaining on earth and the resurrected ones, would be ever with the Lord, joined together among themselves and with the Lord.

St Paul himself was once granted a short stay in heaven— It was a very real experience, although he afterwards could not tell whether he was in the body or out of the body at the time. He does not tell us anything about the glory which he saw there, but he calls attention to what he heard. He heard "unspeakable words." No matter how hard he tried to reproduce those words, he could not, his vocal organs were not shaped to do so, although he distinctly heard and plainly understood them.—No, life in heaven will not be passed in silence.

Glory in Heaven

When we think of heaven we always combine supreme glory with the idea. Rightly so. When Jesus was transfigured before His three disciples, He appeared in glory. When the Prophet Ezekiel saw a vision of God at the river Chebar in the land of the Chaldees, it was a form of pure glory. He describes it in these words: "And I saw as the color of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (Ezek. 1:27, 28).

In heaven we shall reflect this glory. Even our vile bodies will be changed into the likeness of the glorious body of Jesus. In doing his difficult mission work, Paul constantly kept this future glory in mind. "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (1 Tim. 2:10).

There will be no monotony in heaven, so that we might become tired of the constant glory. There will be many variations. Each person will have a glory of his own. Already the Prophet Daniel, in speaking of the resurrection, refers to different forms of glory: "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (chap. 12:3). Similarly, St. Paul calls attention to the differences of glory among sun, moon, and stars: "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory" (1 Cor. 15:41). Then he adds: "So also is the resurrection of the dead" (v. 42).

In a parable Jesus pointed out that a king set one of his servants over ten cities, and another over five (Luke 19:17, 19). They both entered into their Lord's glory, but with a difference in rank. The Book of Revelation says: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them" (chap. 14:13).

May this difference of glory not cause envy or rivalry? Not at all. Each one will rejoice in the gift of glory *which* he has received, and will thank God for His wonderful blessing. Then he will rejoice with the others for the gifts which they have received. Furthermore, each one will use his particular gift for the benefit of the others. There will be great rejoicing, but no envy, rather a united praising of the riches and variety of God's unspeakable blessings.

Our theologians clothed this truth in a play of words, Originally Latin, it would sound in English somewhat like this:

There will be no envy because of a difference in *clarity*.
Because in all will reign the same spirit of *charity*.



The joys of heaven, which we have been studying now for some time, which are so rich that we can never hope to appreciate them properly in this life, will last forever and ever without interruption. Here on earth all things come to an end sooner or later. Especially when we enjoy some pleasant experience, the end usually comes much too soon to suit us. No matter how much we would like to continue in some joy just for a little longer, it simply breaks off. In heaven, however, there will be no fear that suddenly the whole celebration might come to an end. The joys will continue forever and ever.

When Jesus at the last judgment will invite His believers to come unto Him in heaven, then they will enter into "life *eternal*" (Matt. 25:46). We shall be "caught up ... in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air— and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thess. 4:17). The mansions into which we shall then be received are "everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9). "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and *eternal* weight of glory" (II Cor. 4:17). Jesus spoke about "everlasting habitations"; St. Paul calls it "a building of God, an house not made with hands, *eternal* in the heavens" (II Cor. 5:1). The Epistle to the Hebrews calls Jesus "the author of *eternal* salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9). Yes, all they that believe in Jesus Christ have the "promise of *eternal* inheritance" (Heb. 9:15).

The thought that some pleasant experience will have an end, always puts a damper on the joy. It will greatly heighten our joy in heaven to know that our salvation will never come to an end.

Neither will the heavenly joys ever be interrupted. Here on earth clouds and sunshine, joy and pain, keep constantly changing. No joy is ever steady. Especially do we here at all times stand in the shadow of death. In heaven there will be no more death. Those who shall attain to the resurrection of life will be like the angels, and they cannot die anymore (Luke 20:36). Particularly: "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" (Rev. 2:11). The joys of the saints go on without interruption: "They rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come" (Rev. 4:8). Their inheritance "fadeth not away" (I Pet. 1:4). The promise of Jesus will be carried out to the letter: "Ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you" (John 16:22).

How can that be? Here on earth we cannot even imagine such conditions. Here our life is in a constant flux. Changes, and more changes seem to be the very heart of our existence. It is not deemed good when things become "static." We have heard already that after this life there will follow a new heaven and a new earth. "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (Isa. 65:17). Some one might object, What of it? The heaven and the earth may be new; yet how do I know that conditions will be different from what they are now? They will be different, as St. Peter explains. "We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, *wherein dwelleth righteousness*" (II Pet. 3:13). That makes the difference. The new world will be filled with righteousness. There will be no trace of sin. John

in his revelations saw this new world, this heavenly “Jerusalem,” coming down from God “prepared as a *bride adorned* for her husband” (Rev. 21:2).

How Do We Secure This Eternal Bliss?

The only question which now remains—it is a momentous question— is this: How do I get to heaven? What must I do to secure this happiness for myself?

The answer is given us by Jesus Himself— “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). There is nothing left for us to do. The work is finished. Jesus has done it all. By His sacrifice of Himself on the cross, by His suffering and death, He has closed the gates of hell for us; we shall never perish. And He has won and secured eternal life for us in heaven. It is ours. It is kept safe for us, till we shall be called to enter our inheritance. It is offered to us as a free gift of the grace of God. Just take God at His Word. Believe and enjoy the hope which it holds out. Rejoice with Paul: “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 15:57).

It would be a grave mistake if we tried to do something ourselves to secure the blessings of heaven. Such an attempt would heap shame on our Savior, as if His work were not sufficient. And by thinking that we ourselves could do something for which we could demand a reward we would place ourselves under the curse which St. Paul records in Gal. 3:10: “As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” Let us rejoice that God has appointed us to His glorious inheritance. Let us conduct ourselves in this world in such a way as may be expected of rich heirs. And let us diligently do good works to the glory and honor of our heavenly Father, thanking Him for His wonderful gift.

Since our faith is still weak, let us carefully nourish it by meditating the promises of our Lord. That is the purpose for which God is keeping us in this world, that we ourselves constantly grow in faith and that we invite others to join us, so that they also attain the inheritance.

We conclude our studies on eternity with the prayer which the sainted Dr. Hoenecke placed at the close of his presentation of this doctrine: “May Christ Jesus, the Author of our faith, lead us to the happiness of eternal life, blessed for ever and ever. Amen.”

