

**"THE BLESSED HOPE"
(Part 2)**

**WAITING FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST AN ESSENTIAL FEATURE IN THE
CHARACTER OF TRUE CHRISTIANS.**

from

***Plain Sermons
On Subjects
Practical and Prophetic***

by Alexander McCaul

***"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing
of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."
Titus 2:13***

In these words the Apostle Paul propounds a doctrine and sets before us a duty. He propounds a doctrine, inasmuch as these words form a part of an exposition of the Gospel which he commands a Christian bishop to teach. He sets forth a general duty, inasmuch as he at the same time lays open the requirements which the Gospel makes from those to whom it comes. Thus it teaches to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, *"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."*

Agreeably to this double purpose of the Apostle, we considered first the doctrine of the second advent as an essential doctrine of the Gospel, and propose now to shew "that the practice of waiting for the second advent is an essential feature in the character of a true Christian." By an essential feature is meant a feature ascribed to and required of those Christians described in the New Testament. And that this is the case with regard to the habit of waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven, will appear: first, in general, by plain testimonies of Scripture; secondly, particularly, by considering the Scriptural exposition of the words, *"Looking for that blessed hope."*

We refer in the first place to plain testimonies of Scripture. My desire is that this subject should be considered both by you and me as one of the most solemn which can be presented to our consideration, the deep importance of which is therefore to be decided not by subtle deductions wrought out by human ingenuity but by plain and unequivocal declarations of God's most holy word. If God's word in describing Christians points out the practice of waiting for the second advent as one of their distinguishing characteristics, then is my assertion true. And you, brethren, must abide by it or reject the testimony of God, for "to the law and the testimony" it is that the appeal is made.

The first passage to which I direct your attention is 1 Cor. 1:4-7: *"I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."* It is not unreasonable to suppose that those on whose behalf Paul "always thanked God" were true Christians. "Waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" is one of their distinguishing

characteristics.

Among all the churches to whom St. Paul wrote we find none, perhaps, whom this Apostle praises more and blames less than the church of the Thessalonians. To them he says, "*We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Thess. 1:2). But a principal feature in the Christian character of this so highly commended church was "patience of hope" for the second advent, as the Apostle himself testifies when he says, "*They themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven.*"

This passage not only shows that to wait for the Lord from heaven is a feature in the Christian character, but that it is a striking, a prominent and distinguishing feature. For when the Apostle wishes to sum up the effects which the Gospel had produced in the once idolatrous heathen, he chooses two to stand for the whole; and of these two, waiting for the second advent is one: "*Ye turned to God from idols, to serve the true and living God, and to wait for his Son from heaven.*" How highly St. Paul estimated this feature of the Christian character may be seen from the contrast which he draws (in Philip 3:18-21) between true and false Christians. Describing those who are only Christians in name, he says, "*Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.*"

Beside this sad picture of those doomed to perdition, he holds up the portrait of those who shall be saved. It consists only of two features, and one is that they wait for the second advent of the Lord: "*But our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.*"

In the eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, the Apostle also describes the character of true Christians as those "who walk after the Spirit" or "who are led by the Spirit," in contradistinction to those who walk after the flesh," and who are therefore not true Christians. And here again we find the same characteristic of the sons of God, the expectation of that blessed hope which shall be realized at the coming of the Lord.

"The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ: if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waits for this manifestation of the sons of God. . . For we know that the whole creation groans and travails 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. For we are saved by hope; but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man sees, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it."

This passage is long, but it is so important that I could not but quote it at length. You see here the character of true Christians—sons of God, heirs of God, and joint heirs of Christ. You see that there is an object which they vehemently desire and for which they groan. You see that this object is "that blessed hope" mentioned in my text; and, because this object is not yet attained,

you hear "that they *with patience wait for it.*"

When St. Peter is describing true Christians, those whom he calls "*Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Christ,*" he says that they are "*born again unto a lively hope of salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time*" (1 Pet. 1:5). So that he makes this spirit of waiting for the second advent a part of that new nature which Christians receive through the Holy Ghost, and which, consequently, distinguishes them from those who are still in an unregenerate or carnal state. And as he tells them that they had been, by the abundant mercy of God, begotten to this lively hope, so he exhorts them to abide in it. "*Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ*" (1 Peter 1:13).

St. John in the third chapter of his first epistle lays open the difference between the children of God and the children of the devil. His characteristics of the children of God agree exactly with those assigned by St. Paul and St. Peter: that they have a blessed hope, and that this hope moves them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. "*Beloved,*" says he, "*now are we the sons of God, and it does 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. And every man that hath this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure*" (John 3:2).

Lastly, our blessed Lord, when he describes the character of those who shall be acknowledged as the blessed of his Father at the great day of his appearing, also distinctly notices this feature of waiting for his second advent. "*Blessed—blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he comes shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.*"

The Scriptures already cited are abundantly sufficient to prove that in describing the character of true Christians, the word of God includes the practice of waiting for the second advent as an essential feature.

But that a subject so important may be deeply impressed upon our minds it is necessary to urge one consideration more. The Holy Spirit not only notices this waiting for the second advent as a feature in the character of those who shall be saved, but also expressly declares that the want [lack] of this waiting spirit is a mark of those who shall be lost. Of these, some are represented as flattering themselves, and teaching others that the coming of the Lord is not so near. "*My lord delays his coming . . . But the Lord of that servant will come in a day when he looks not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers*" (Matt. 24:48, 51.)

Some will flatter themselves that there is no fear and no need of watching at present, and therefore go on fearlessly with their worldly occupations. They will, like the generations of Noah and Lot, "*eat and drink, buy and sell, plant and build*"; things in themselves not sinful. But "*when they shall say, 'Peace and safety,' then sudden destruction comes upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape*" (1 Thess. 5:3). Some shall even be "*scoffers, saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming?' and shall bring swift destruction upon themselves*" (2 Peter 3:3, 4).

Thus you see that waiting for the second advent was a feature of true Christians in the times of

the Apostles, and will be of those who are saved when the Lord comes as a thief; whereas those who wait and watch not shall have their portion with unbelievers. Such is the evidence of plain Scripture passages to prove that the practice of waiting for the second advent is a feature in the character of a true Christian.

We now proceed to consider particularly what this "waiting" is, as expressed in the text by the words "looking for that blessed hope," and to show from the nature of the duty that the practice of waiting for the second advent is an essential feature in the character of a true Christian.

The glorious coming of the Lord is represented in Scripture as the promised return of a kind master to his faithful servants. To wait for that which is promised is an exercise of faith. It is likened to the sudden coming of a thief, against which we have been warned. To take heed to the warnings of God is an effect of holy fear. It is compared to the return of the beloved Bridegroom. That the bride should wait with earnest desires for his return is an evidence of love. It is set forth as the return of the Lord to his disciples, for which he commands them to watch. To wait for it, then, is an act of obedience. But in whichever of these four points of view we consider the practice of waiting for the second advent, whether as an exercise of faith, an effect of holy fear, an evidence of love, or an act of obedience, it is equally an essential feature in the character of a true Christian. Faith is an essential feature of a true Christian, for "*without faith it is impossible to please God.*" The promises of God are the object of faith. The promise of the Lord's return is one of those most frequently repeated.

Where then is faith in this promise if the practice of waiting for it is wanting? Remember brethren, that faith is an operative principle, and whatever be its object it produces certain effects. When faith fixes upon the promise of forgiveness of sins, it drives to prayer and confession. When it lays hold upon the promise of the Holy Spirit for sanctification, it produces earnest supplication that will not be silenced until the promise is fulfilled. When it looks to the often repeated promise of the Lord's return, it generates a habit of waiting for it with patience.

The servants who believe that their Lord will return according to his promise gird their loins, put on the best apparel, and hold all things in readiness. And though the shades of evening should set in, they despair not; and though the darkness of midnight should begin to pass, they slumber not but keep their lights burning, and hearken in watchful silence to every distant sound that may perhaps give notice of their Lord's approach. And if they speak, if the silence of expectation be broken, it is to rouse the slumbering or to ask, "*Watchman, what of the night?*" or to discourse about the happy meeting; for their Lord has promised to return, and they believe his promise. Faith in the promise necessarily produces these effects. When, then, the effects follow not, where is the faith? And where there is no practice of waiting, what evidence is there of faith in the Lord's promise?

Some may perhaps say that it is not yet time to expect the Lord's advent. It would therefore be folly to wait for it. When it is near, it will be time enough to look for it. If there be in this congregation any in this faithless state of mind, let me remind them that this is exactly the excuse of the unprofitable servant whose portion is appointed with the unbelievers. Mark these words, "with the unbelievers." He says, "*My Lord delays his coming.*" It is not so near--no need of watching yet! You will perhaps answer, "We are watching for death; for death will certainly arrest us before the Lord come again." I ask in reply, Where has the Lord commanded you to watch for death instead of watching for his second coming? Tell me the chapter and the verse. I ask you, in the second place, what reason you have for thinking that death will surprise you

sooner than the second advent? Who revealed to you the day and hour of which no man knows? You will reply, "No man has revealed it to me. My belief that death will precede the second advent is founded on no declaration of Scripture. My own reason tells me of it. So many generations have already passed away without the Lord's coming that it is now most probable that the present will pass away in like manner."

If this be your mode of arguing, then beyond all doubt you believe more firmly in the probable conclusions of your own reason than in the words of your Lord and Master. Where then is your faith? And where is your likeness to those disciples of whom our Lord says, "*Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he comes shall find watching.*" But whatever you may think of your own state, you cannot possibly deny that steadfastly to trust in Christ's promise, confidently to expect its fulfilment, and humbly to obey his commands is an indispensable evidence of the reality of that faith, without which no man has a right to esteem himself as one of Christ's true disciples.

This practice of waiting is also compared to the state of a householder who expects his house to be attacked, but knows not the hour when the thief may come. He therefore remains in a state of suspense and fear, and consequently of active vigilance. He knows that his property, and perhaps his life, are at stake. He therefore takes heed that his heart be not overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness or with the cares of this life, and so the thief come unawares. This represents the habit of holy fear in which the true Christian lives, contemplating the awful transactions of the great day of Christ's appearing and remembering that it will come as a snare upon all them that dwell upon the earth; such a state of mind as the Apostle describes when he says, "*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 has done, whether it be good or bad: knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men*" (2 Cor. 5:10, 11). Need I stop, my brethren, to prove that this is an essential feature in the character of a true Christian? No. Your consciences assure you that no man is a true Christian without it.

The coming of the Lord is likened also to the return of the bridegroom long delayed but surely promised. And the Bridegroom is chief among ten thousand. To him the bride owes life and liberty. He delivered her from death, and ransomed her from captivity. For her he left his Father's house, forsook his Father's throne, and took upon himself the form of a servant; endured countless hardships, and suffered countless wrongs. And the bride is not insensible to his love nor indifferent to the promise of his coming. The days of his absence are days of mourning. "*She seeks him whom her soul loves; she seeks and finds him not*" (Song 3:1). She counts the days "*until the winter be past, and the rain over and gone; until the fig-tree puts forth her green figs*" (Song 2:11-13); for that is the promised sign of his approach. She cries, "*Make haste, my beloved.*" "*The Spirit and the bride say, Come.*" And were it otherwise, were the bride happy and content without the bridegroom, careless and indifferent to his coming, where were her love? And when persons calling themselves Christians are perfectly satisfied with the present state of things and utterly indifferent to their Lord's return, where is their love? Does that man really love the Lord Jesus Christ, who almost never meditates upon his union with him, who never prays for his coming, who never looks at the signs of the times to see whether it be near?

I speak not now of those who have never fled for refuge to the Saviour and who have therefore no experience of his forgiving love, [since] for them to pray for the Saviour's return would be presumption. But [I speak] of those who profess to have found forgiveness of sins and justification by faith. Have you no desire to behold Him who purchased for you these blessings

with his precious blood, to see Him as he is and be like Him, to fall down before his throne with a heart overflowing with gratitude and to join in the glorious song of the redeemed, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain"? But whatever be your state, acknowledge that to wait in humble and earnest expectation for the Lord's return, as the bride waits for the bridegroom, is an evidence of love; and that love is an essential feature in the character of a true Christian.

Lastly, to wait for the Lord's coming is an act of obedience; and without obedience, to talk of faith, hope, love, or any other Christian grace is nothing short of madness.

"*Ye are my friends,*" says our Lord, "*if ye do whatsoever I command you.*" If, therefore, the Lord had but once given a command to watch for his second advent, it would have been sufficient to bind us to obedience. But I know of no command more frequently repeated in the New Testament than this. I have already in the former discourse remarked how often it is insisted on, and how variously applied. I will now only notice how often it occurs as a command.

It occurs as an express and positive command at least eight times in the Gospels, five times in the Epistles, and twice in the Revelations of St. John; altogether fifteen times.¹ It is a command given in the most solemn manner, with a blessing attached to those who obey it,² and a curse pronounced upon them who disobey it.³ It is a command accompanied by a declaration that is applicable to all, so that no one can hold himself excepted. "*What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.*" It is a command so clearly expressed and so exactly limited by the context that it cannot be interpreted figuratively, nor wrested to apply to anything but the coming of the Lord in glory. For in the Gospels it is preceded by an account of the judgment; and in the Epistles, connected with the resurrection of the dead, or the conflagration of the world.

What then is the state of a man who deliberately disobeys such a command as this? If obedience be at all times necessary, is it not in such a case indispensable? Will any man dare, under any pretext whatsoever, to dispense himself or others from such a command as this? Or can any man so grossly deceive himself as to imagine that he is a true Christian when he is living in willful disobedience to his Lord's plainly revealed will? There is but one infallible mark of a true Christian—obedience to his Lord's commands; and he that waits not for the Lord's coming has it not. He may possess great knowledge of the mysteries of the Gospel, but he is "a child of disobedience."

You see then, brethren, that whether we look at the express testimonies of Scripture or consider the nature of waiting for the second advent, as it is set forth in Scripture, as an exercise of faith, a state of holy fear, an effect of love, or an act of obedience, my assertion is true. The practice of waiting for the second advent of the Lord is an essential feature in the character of a true Christian.

I have now finished the consideration of the text in those two points of view which I purposed. It remains only that I should apply the whole subject. But oh, how different must the application be from what it ought to be, whether I apply it collectively to the congregation as a part of Christ's universal church or personally as to individual Christians! Truly, my brethren, the application must be as unsuitable to the subject as the sermon was. The subject is, "*that blessed*

1 Matt. 24:42, 44; 25:13; Mark 13:33, 35, 37; Luke 12:35-40; 21:36; 1 Thess. 5:1-6; Titus 2:12, 13; James 5:7, 8; 1 Peter 4:7; 2 Peter 3:14; Rev. 3:3; 16:15.

2 ^aBlessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching.^o

3 ^aThey shall be cut asunder, and have their portion appointed with the unbelievers.^o

hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." A sermon upon this subject ought to have been one of congratulation, of comfort, of joy. And my proper duty as a minister of Christ should have been to speak comfortably to his spouse, to remind her that her blessed Lord will soon come, and to cheer her heart with the prospect of a happy meeting and an eternal union.

So it was that Paul treated the subject when he wrote to the Thessalonians. He needed not to prove, as I have been forced to do, that the doctrine of the second advent is an essential doctrine of the Gospel, or that the practice of waiting for the second advent is an essential feature in the character of a true Christian. Faith, and hope, and earnest desire preached all this, for the bride was then her first love. She was looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, so that the Apostle, instead of quickening her languid desires, was rather forced to restrain her ardor. Instead of ransacking all Scripture and amassing precepts of the Lord to persuade the bride to consider the subject at all, he was obliged to write an epistle to prevent her from considering it too much. Instead of employing all the strength and authority of the word of God to deliver her from the faithless suggestion, *"My Lord delays his coming,"* he was compelled to entreat her not to expect him too soon. *"Now we beseech you, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter, as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand."*

Oh, how miserably has the bride of Christ apostatized! How languid her hope, how weak her faith, how cold her love! How then can a minister of Christ comfort her with the hope of the Lord's return? He must fear that the Lord will come, not to celebrate the marriage, but to reject the faithless bride and choose another. He must anticipate that the second advent will be the antitype of the first; and that as Christ then cast off the faithless Jewish church, his second advent will be to condemn the Gentile church because of unbelief. His preaching, therefore, must not be the voice of rejoicing but the language of reproof. He must not say, *"Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion, for lo I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee."* But he must make use of the message of warning: *"I know thy works, that Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember, therefore, how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."* *"I am against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."*

I now proceed to address you individually as private Christians; and here "I take you to record, that I am pure from the blood of all men." I have shewn you from the word of God the deep importance of the second advent as a doctrine of the Gospel, and also that to wait for it is an essential feature in the character of a true Christian. I can do no more. Your part is now to judge yourselves faithfully and impartially, and then to pronounce whether this practice of waiting be a feature of your character.

When you heard of the faithful and affectionate servants, with their loins girt and their lights burning, did you recognize your own state of expectation? Or when the prudent householder was held up to your view, did your conscience bear testimony that such is the state of holy fear in which you daily walk? Or when the affectionate impatience of the bride was described, did your heart respond to, or rather echo, the breathing of love? And when the oft repeated command to watch was urged, did you rejoice at the consciousness of having yielded obedience? Do you watch

and pray always, that you may be thought worthy to escape those things that are coming upon the earth, and to stand before the Son of man? Is the coming of the Lord in glory the subject of your daily meditation; the preparation for it the chief of your religious employments; the observation of the signs of the times the object of your constant attention; the prospect of its speedy approach your blessed hope? Or, if this be too much to require, do you ever look for it? Do you ever search the Scriptures that you may know whether that day be far or near? Do you ever feel the movings of tender affection when you think of being united forever to your Lord?

I know, my beloved brethren, that a sense of sinfulness and the daily out-breakings of inward corruption will often convert that which St. Paul calls a "blessed hop," into an object of terror. But love wherever it exists will overcome fear, and at times at least assert its supremacy. Judge then of your love, your faith, your hope, your obedience, the subject which has now been presented for your consideration; and by all these together judge of your Christian character. We shall all find cause for humiliation before God. But let us not be cast down. The Lord intended that his second advent should be a blessed hoped for sinners as well as the first. Let us then be thankful that the cry has gone forth, "*Behold the Lord comes,*" and that there is still time to trim our lamps before we go forth to meet Him. And let us, while it is still today, take heed to him that speaks from heaven and says, "*Behold I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.*"