

# *The Revelation of Righteous Judgment Series*

## PART 21

### "JUDGMENT AT THE HOUSE"

(CONTINUED)

**I Peter 4:17...***"FOR THE TIME IS NOW, of the judgment beginning at the house of God..."* (Wuest's Expanded Translation).

**II Thess. 2:7-8...***"for THE SECRET POWER OF LAWLESSNESS IS ALREADY AT WORK; but the One Who now holds it back will continue to do so till He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of His mouth, and destroy by the splendor of His coming..."* (New International Version).

Since Part 15 of our series, we have been considering Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, (the first four chapters in particular), and especially how it parallels with the words he had written to the Thessalonians, concerning the revelation and consummation of the infamous man of sin. Though each of these writings has its own unique perspective (the one, from the practical, the other, leaning more toward the mystical), they are like twin peaks of a majestic mountain, both reaching upward in lofty expression. Most definitely, their intersecting lines and points of similarity have become increasingly apparent to us, as we have advanced from subject to subject along its graceful slopes. Now we stand at the height of summary, where the twain come to share a single vision. There is but one view from the top!

As early as Part 5, we identified the notorious man of sin as being the Adamic nature which plagues mankind in general. In subsequent articles, we resounded God's repeated efforts throughout history to expose and exterminate his every expression, beginning in His house (whose house are we). Then, we opened this present portion of study by noticing God's primary objective in I Corinthians, which is manifestly declared in chapter 1, verse 9: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent". This has been the theme which has consistently run throughout our reading, and coincides with what we discovered to be the Lord's plans for the man of sin in general (understandably so, since the wisdom of this world finds its origin in the old man).

We left off at I Corinthians chapter 4, and midway into verse 3; and it is here that we shall resume. In this line, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment", we noticed an interesting little distinction from the original. The phrase, "man's judgment" should more accurately be rendered, "MAN'S DAY". This

is the way it reads in the Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, and is confirmed by a simple examination of the actual wording. Certainly, old Adam has "had his day". In fact, for the past six thousand years now, he has had opportunity to express himself in a wide variety of ways, and seemingly without restraint. He has consistently wielded the gavel in his oppressive court of injustice; it has inherently been handed down from generation to generation. History testifies loudly and persuasively of this, while creation has groaned pitifully under the strain. From the very moment Adam first began to judge according to the seeing of the eyes, and the hearing of the ears, he has moved within that day, and walked according to the spirit of that day. Ah, what horrible mistakes have been rendered in his courtroom! What wrongful verdicts have been drawn! The innocent have suffered horribly, while the guilty have gone free!

However, we are thrilled to announce that we are coming to the end of his day, with all of its twisted and distorted judgments. A new day is dawning, as the Daystar arises in our hearts! As Christ appears more and more in our heavens, He is simultaneously revealing the secret activities of the mystery man in the temple. At times, the disclosures have been almost too embarrassing to bear. And, had the Lord not shown us the purpose of the revelations, we might have otherwise been tempted to "sew up the veil that was rent", so to speak, and defend the spirit of antichrist within. But because of Him, we understand that the revelations have been altogether necessary! For as oft as the man of sin is uncovered in his varied and diverse manifestations, as oft as we acknowledge what has been revealed concerning him, and we come to rue the day we ever made alliance with him, the Lord descends from heaven with a shout! He comes with a vengeance to deal with the arch-enemy of our souls! It is then that He abolishes the man of lawlessness by the fiery-hot breath (inspiration) of His mouth, and destroys his so-called wisdom (as we shall hopefully come to understand a little better in this article,) by the brightness of His coming! What a great and wondrous process this is!

### **A TRIVIAL PURSUIT**

Surprisingly enough, one of the last bastions of Adam's governing authority in the temple has been disguised under a very clever and practically unrecognizable cover. This soulish stronghold is brought to the arena of our attention by a single line uttered by the apostle Paul. As we mentioned above, we dealt with his attitude toward others' judgment of him in our last message. Now we come to the second part of the third verse: "...yea, I judge not mine own self" (I Cor. 4:3b). Ah, dear friends, volumes were spoken in those few words!

But how should we understand this statement? Later, in this same letter, to the same group of people, Paul seems to have contradicted himself, when he said, "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (I Cor. 11:31). This would naturally cause some to wonder whether or not our brother suffered from a serious case of double-mindedness. But let us assure you, there was no confusion in his mind; there was no "clashing of swords" between his ears. He meant what he said, and said what he meant. His words must simply be taken in their proper context, and rightly divided by those who

hear them. The explanation becomes perfectly clear, when we let the Spirit provide the interpretation!

It is our persuasion that in this hour, one of the most important issues needing clarification in the minds of God's people is this matter of "soul-searching", or self examination. By this, we are not talking about a simple acknowledgment of the obvious. Some things are unmistakably addressed in Scripture, and need but little consideration on our parts. Either they are right, or they are not. Nay, rather, what we are referring to is the wearisome practice of rehearsing and replaying our every thought, emotion, and experience over and over in our minds, and assuming the responsibility of deciding for ourselves which are good and which are evil. Though this appears to be a very useful and necessary exercise, the right and proper means by which we are to discover the man of sin within; and though it is one which has been promoted with tremendous enthusiasm from pulpits all across this planet, we believe that it has inadvertently given license to an obsession with self. Now, we understand that for the most part, those of us who have engaged in it have done so with honorable intentions. It is usually done in all sincerity, with a genuine desire to improve one's self (this is one of the reasons why it is so difficult to address). Since we have all practiced it to one degree or another, it is a subject with which every one of us is quite familiar. But we would be so bold as to say that IT HAS NOT BROUGHT ANY ONE OF US ONE BIT CLOSER TO GOD!

We imagine that by now, the arguments have already started forming. The theological defense-mechanisms have kicked in! We can almost hear the protests out loud: "WHAT? Have you lost your mind? After all the time we have spent in careful self-analysis, painstakingly studying and rehashing the past, and, to the best of our moral and ethical ability, weighing it all in the balances of what we think is right, now you're telling us that this has not made us more Christ-like?" That reaction would be predictable. But before tossing the matter aside, perhaps we should reexamine it in light of what the Scriptures have to say concerning it. It may well be that the Lord would bring balance and understanding to an issue potentially detrimental to our spiritual development, and to a subject that has served as a major distraction from what should be our chief focus. (We would encourage you to hear the conclusion of the matter; ref. Prov. 18:13).

To begin with, would it shock you to discover that not once are we commanded in Scripture to perform this popular religious exercise? That's right! While it is generally taken for granted that there is abundant grounds for it throughout the Bible, a simple survey shows that this is just not so. In fact, whenever the subject is raised in theological circles, only two passages from the New Testament are cited as proof texts. However, when these are considered in light of their particular settings, it becomes apparent that they in no wise encourage the general practice of examining one's own emotions and experiences, but have their special scope. For the record, shall we take a look at them?

The first passage which is commonly quoted is found in the chapter previously mentioned, I Corinthians 11. The passage reads as follows: "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and

drink of that cup...For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (vs. 27, 28, 31). Those of you who are familiar with this chapter know that Paul was speaking specifically of the Lord's supper (v. 20); and, in commenting on it, was reminding the Corinthian believers of its original intent. The reference made to examining themselves was simply in respect to their recognizing the bread and the cup as the symbolic body and blood of the Lord, lest the affair should deteriorate into an opportunity for carnal fellowship, fleshly indulgence, or meaningless religious ritual. It should seem obvious, therefore, that rather than being commanded to turn within themselves to scan their faults in order that they might make spiritual progress, they were merely being urged to ask themselves whether they were mindful of the true meaning of the table of the Lord, and all that it signified.

The other passage is in II Corinthians 13, verses 5 and 6. Here we read, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates". Once again, the call to examine themselves was related to a particular sphere of attention. In this, the topic of discussion was whether Paul was really speaking as an ambassador for Christ, or whether he was speaking for himself. This is clearly seen in verse 3 of the chapter: "Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you". It should be remembered that at that time, certain individuals in Corinth were attempting to sow discord among the brethren by questioning Paul's inspiration. They were suggesting that his teachings were not of a divine origin, but perhaps were fabricated from his own foolish heart. Therefore, his exhortation to the faithful was this: "If you want evidence that Christ is speaking through this earthen vessel, simply examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith. If you are, and if Christ really is in you of a truth, know therefore that you yourselves are the proof of my apostleship. Otherwise, we are all found to be reprobates". What greater evidence could they have had than this, that their lives had been undeniably changed through the acceptance of his gospel? They were his living epistles, known and read of all men (II Cor. 3:2)!

Both of these passages, in I Cor. 11 and II Cor. 13, have their particular subject; and in neither of them do we find the slightest bit of support for the concept which has evolved from them in modern times. Dare we make more of them than was originally intended?

Still, some may not be satisfied. The query might be raised, "What about the 77th Psalm? It sounds like Asaph was advocating the act of soul-searching, when he says, 'I commune with my own heart: and my spirit made a diligent search' ". Lest there be any misunderstanding here, let us briefly consider the mood preceding this passage. The Lord would have each of us to be fully persuaded in our own minds!

There are a few things about this psalm that could be noted, not last of which is the fact that this is NOT your model prayer. He begins by saying that "in the day of my trouble I sought the Lord...[but] my soul refused to be comforted..." (verse 2). He goes on to say, "I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed..." (verse 3). Let's see, now...by his own admission, he says that he refused to be comforted,

he was troubled at the thought of God, he complained, and as a result, his spirit was overwhelmed. Does this sound like the kind of attitude you would want to foster in prayer?

It was in this depressed, isolated state of mind that he uttered the familiar line under consideration: "I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search" (verse 6). Verses 7-9 provide us with the lyrics to this mournful tune, which issued forth during the dark night of the soul: "Will the Lord cast off for ever? And will He be favorable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Selah". We should keep in mind that this was the "happy" chorus of one whose spirit has just made a diligent search! (Should we be surprised?)

Beloved, no matter where we might look, there is absolutely nothing which garners scriptural substantiation for this deceitful practice. It's just not there! And with good reason. For whenever we engage in these random and self-initiated acts of personal inquisition, it is bound to result in one of two things: either it will fill us full of self-adulation and smug self-satisfaction, or it will drive us into the deepest depths of discouragement and despair. Furthermore, it may very well cause us to question God's righteous judgments and intentions toward His children, as was the case with Asaph. In any event, the soul is invariably obscured from any sight of God and His saving strength, and wholly taken up with itself. It pays it's primary attention to the all-important self!

### **A MISTAKEN CALL OF DUTY**

Though these may be seen as strange, new thoughts for some, we are certainly not alone in our conviction. A number of years ago, Hannah Whittal Smith commented on this, saying, "Probably no subject connected with the religious life has been the cause of more discomfort and suffering to tender consciences than has this subject of self-examination. And yet it has been so constantly impressed upon us that it is our duty to examine ourselves, that the eyes of most of us are continually turned inward, and our gaze is fixed on our own interior states and feelings to such an extent that self, and not Christ, has come at last to fill the whole horizon.

"By self I mean here all that centers around this great big 'me' of ours. It is a vocabulary with which we are all very familiar. The questions we ask ourselves in our times of self-examination are proof of this. 'Am I earnest enough?' 'Have I repented enough?' 'Have I the right sort of feelings?' 'Do I realize religious truth as I ought?' 'Are my prayers fervent enough?' 'Is my interest in religious things as great as it ought to be?' 'Do I love God with enough fervor?' 'Is the Bible as much of a delight to me as it is to others?' All these, and a hundred more questions about ourselves and our experiences fill up all our thoughts, and sometimes our little self-examination books as well; and day and night we ring the changes on the personal pronoun 'I', 'me', 'my', to the utter exclusion of any thought concerning Christ, or any word concerning 'He', 'His', or 'Him'.

"The misery of this, many of us know only too well. But the idea that the Bible is full of commands to self-examination is so prevalent that it seems one of the most truly pious things we can do; and, miserable as it makes us, we still feel it is our duty to go on with it in spite of an ever-increasing sense of hopelessness and despair." ---end quote.

How true this is! In spite of its effects, and in spite of the disheartening waves of depression that oftentimes come as a result of it, we still feel duty-bound to set our sights on self. Armed with endorsements from clergy, and feeling as if we are somehow satisfying the strict demands of deity, we go about our business totally absorbed in our own little private vortex of feelings and experiences, all at the expense of our being truly Christ-centered. As difficult as this may be to hear, whenever we do this, rather than drawing closer to Him, we are actually distancing ourselves, and turning away from the only one who can really do anything for us!

As we all well know, it is in the predictable nature of the flesh to crave attention. It loves to be the object of affection, be it praise, pity, promotion, or other. And while it would prefer to be thought of in a favorable light, it would rather be thought of badly, than not to be thought of at all. Therefore, this is one way it can get the attention that it wants so desperately, without drawing suspicion. (For who would think that one who is always conscious of, and declaring their own faults and shortcomings is actually indulging in a form of self-love?)

Using language reminiscent to that employed in our study, again, we would quote from Hannah Whittal Smith: "When Christians spend their time examining their own condition, raking up all their sins, and bemoaning their shortcomings, what is this but to set up the 'abomination' of their own sinful self upon the chief pedestal in their hearts, and to make it the center of their whole religious life, and of all their care and efforts. They gaze at this great, big, miserable self until it fills their whole horizon, and they 'turn their back' on the Lord, until He is lost sight of altogether.

"I will venture to say that there are many Christians who, for one look at the Lord, will give a thousand looks at self, and who, for one hour spent in rejoicing in Him, will spend hundreds of hours bemoaning themselves.

"We are never anywhere commanded to behold our emotions, nor our experiences, nor even our sins, but we are commanded to turn our backs upon all these, and to behold the Lamb of God who taketh away our sins. One look at Christ is worth more for salvation than a million looks at self. Yet so mistaken are our ideas, we seem unable to avoid thinking that the mortification which results from self-examination must have in it some saving power, because it makes us so miserable. For we have to travel a long way on our heavenly journey before we fully learn that there is no saving power in misery, and that a cheerful, confident faith is the only successful attitude for the aspiring soul". ---end quote.

## **CONSIDER THE SOURCE**

Make no mistake about it: the Lord does want us to know ourselves. It is His desire that we should see our lives realistically and honestly, without bias or false assumption. That should go without question. But we may rest assured that the type of independent self-examination we are accustomed to performing cannot and will not provide a consistently accurate view of one's self. True, the spirit of man has within it the ability to know certain things about itself, as it is written, "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" (I Cor. 2:11). And, "The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy" (Prov. 14:10). Indeed, as we have expounded upon in an earlier writing, "the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching the inward parts of the belly" (Prov. 20:27). These scriptures, and others like them, show that there is a God-given faculty inherent within the human spirit of every man that is designed to probe into the deepest recesses of the soul (John 1:9). This is why it has come so naturally for us to do so (even prior to our conversion experience). But unless it receives continued illumination by the Spirit, it can only provide a limited knowledge at best (and, as you know, part-truth can sometimes be more dangerous than no truth at all).

Another who has weighed in on this is Watchman Nee. He has written, " 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it?' (Jer. 17:9). Our heart being such, how can introspection be trustworthy? For we will be examining ourselves with a deceitful heart; and it is inevitable that we will be deceived by this deceitful heart. For instance, we may be wrong, yet the heart will instead justify us. Or, we may not be wrong but only weak, yet the heart will condemn us as being wrong. Were the heart perfect, it could serve as a standard. Since it is so deceitful, however, how can it be the rule? To use such an inaccurate standard to measure ourselves must without doubt lead to deception.

"We should realize how very complicated is our inner constitution. Our will, thought, and emotion --- together with the working of the heart --- are highly intricate. It is impossible to analyze them thoroughly and understand their inter-relationships. Given such a complex situation, our introspection can never give us an accurate self-knowledge. For when we examine our own feeling we do not know how much is affected by, and involved with, other things. Consequently, the knowledge which comes from our own feeling is undependable. A slight influence may alter our feeling completely. Frequently we fail to make a right judgment on a certain matter or lack an accurate knowledge of our motive because there is in us some hidden sin, some wrong thought, some little prejudice, some natural inclination or countless other small hindrances. The very complexity and instability of our beings cause us to be inaccurate in our judgments.

"As a result, we often encounter such paradoxes as the following. A person may be quite strong on a certain point, yet not only is he unaware of it, he even feels weak in that regard. On the other hand, he may be very weak on another point, yet he is totally unconscious of it and thinks himself strong notwithstanding. These are common occurrences, and they clearly tell us one thing: that in spite of introspection there is no real self-knowledge" ---end quote.

This is undoubtedly what Paul had in mind when he said, "For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified; but He that judgeth me is the Lord..." (I Cor. 4:4). Or, as it's rendered in the Williams translation, "For although my conscience does not accuse me, yet am I not entirely vindicated by that. It is the Lord Himself Who must examine me". Though there was nothing troubling his conscience at the moment, no secret sin that came to mind, that was still not enough to justify him. He knew that as fair and impartial as he might want to be with himself, his first, and final, and ultimate authority must be the Lord. Only then could he be confident of the verdict. All premature judgment, whether coming from himself, or from someone else, would be a dangerously untrustworthy diagnosis, and could prove extremely costly if followed.

With good reason, Jesus is referred to as "the Great Physician". The fact that He has earned this title gives Him full legitimacy to examine those who come to Him for help. But whenever we examine ourselves, we are like the man who prefers his own advice over his doctor's (for whatever reason), and makes the foolhardy decision to diagnose himself at home. Either he will overlook or ignore something that is potentially life-threatening, passing it off as unimportant and insignificant to his well-being; or else he will make himself all the more sick with worry, while he thinks of what his symptoms could be. Based on the mish-mash of misinformation he has gathered from different sources, the hypochondriac speculates, guesses, and struggles to come up with something that will explain his ailing condition. Yet he is none the better, though he devotes long and hapless hours to the pitiful prognosis. He is just not qualified for such complicated matters...and neither are we!

But even if we could discover our true condition through our own personal probings, we would still find ourselves in an irresolvable dilemma. For once we have seen ourselves as we really are, what could we possibly do about it in our own strength?

In the Genesis account, we read that once Adam partook of the forbidden "fruit" of the knowledge of good and evil, "the eyes of both of them were opened"...opened, perhaps, to one dimension, but most certainly closed to another. Nevertheless, this eye-opening experience signified the loss of their innocence (that state which is without any sense of guilt or condemnation, being primarily God-conscious in their thoughts), and marked the point in which they became predominantly self-conscious. It is to be admitted that while they were in this state, they did perceive their naked and vulnerable condition. And what they knew of themselves was not wrong. They were indeed devoid of covering, and no longer preserved in their originally pure, virginal state of mind. But the big question with God was: "WHO TOLD THEE that thou wast naked?" (Gen. 3:11) You see, His concern is not just that we see our true condition; but equally as important, what THE SOURCE of that knowledge might be. For if we accustom ourselves to receiving from the wrong source, we will eventually come to confuse it with the right. Herein lies the fundamental problem: by listening to the voice of the flesh, even when it seems to be offering correct and honest information, the man of sin is nevertheless allowed to remain in the temple, leaving the impression that he is God. It is not necessarily a deliberate, premeditated act on our parts; and it is doubtful that many of us would even take the time to think of it in this light. But the truth of the matter is, we reject God's judicial authority over our lives

every time we take it upon ourselves to independently judge between good and evil, no matter how good and honorable our intentions might seem. What's more, whenever we find ourselves in this situation, we usually have an inclination and predisposition to try to work out a solution in and of ourselves, without inquiring of God for assistance. It was true with Adam after "the fall"; and it is true with us.

As Jack Coe would say, "people are funny people". When it comes to matters of religion, we get some crazy ideas in our heads. Beloved, we are no more able to "fix" ourselves, than one would be able to perform a delicate heart surgery on himself. It is completely beyond human capability! Yet, we have convinced ourselves that something must be done on our behalf, even if we have to do it ourselves, though we run the risk of making matters worse! Can't we just trust the Surgeon of our souls to do what is right? Or do we think that our incompetent meddling will somehow straighten things out?

We understand the logic of some. They fear that unless they periodically launch their own independent probes, they will allow some "little fox" to slip by unnoticed, and spoil the vine (Song 2:15). But may we put your mind to ease on this? Regardless of our most earnest efforts, we still know not what we should pray for as we ought (Rom. 8:26-27). It is of absolute necessity, therefore, that "He that searcheth the hearts, [and] knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit" help us with our infirmities, by making intercession for the saints according to the will of God. David obviously understood this; and it prompted him to pray, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults. Keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: THEN shall I be innocent from the great transgression" (Psa. 19:12-13 ). And this is why our prayers should be, "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart...Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psa. 26:2; 139:23-24). If our focus is totally upon the Lord, HE WILL SEE TO IT THAT WE ARE CONSTANTLY INFORMED OF OUR CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS (or, at least, of that with which He would have us be concerned). We needn't worry about a thing, as long as our minds are stayed on Him (Isa. 26:3)! He will keep us in perfect peace, if we will but trust in Him!

Before moving on, it would profit us to pause, and understand what it is that makes us do this. Though it seems quite a mystery, and though there may be other reasons, we believe that the 17th century Frenchman, Fenelon, touched on one of the answers, when he wrote: "There is something very hidden and very deceptive in the suffering [self-examination] causes; for while you seem to yourself to be wholly occupied with the glory of God, in your inmost soul it is self alone that occasions all your trouble. You are indeed desirous that God should be glorified, but you wish it should take place by means of your perfection, and you thus cherish the sentiments of self-love. It is simply a refined pretext for dwelling in self...a sort of infidelity to simple faith when we desire to be continually assured that we are doing well. It is, in fact, a desire to know what we are doing, which we shall never know, and of which it is the will of God we should be ignorant. It is trifling by the way, in order to reason about the way. The safest and shortest course is to renounce, forget, and abandon self, and, through faithfulness to God, to think no more of

it. This is the whole of religion---to get out of self and self-love in order to get into God"  
---end quote.

Whether we are aware of it or not, this desire to continually be assured that we are doing well is really a subtle form of insecurity, and is one of the chief driving forces behind self-examination. We feel that we need some type of reassuring confirmation that we have "measured up", that everything checks out well with us; and so we "rack our brains", trying to appropriate that feeling (oftentimes repenting over and over for things of which the Lord has not even convicted us), while the Lord would have us exercise simple faith in His love and ability to alert us to any encroaching problems. It may sound far-fetched, but what it actually amounts to is substituting human endeavor for trusting in Christ! Whoso hath an ear, let him hear!

There is obviously only one remedy for this self-inflicted affliction, and that is the one Fenelon suggested: to renounce, forget, and abandon self altogether; and, with patient discipline of spirit, to wait upon the Lord, having our affections resolutely set on things above. Until we do this, we will continue to stumble over ourselves, in our efforts to get beyond ourselves. There can be no real progress without it.

It has wisely been pointed out that the passage in Heb. 12:2, "Looking unto Jesus...", is much more expressive in the original Greek text than the way the King James version renders it. There is something missing between the words "looking" and "unto Jesus", which, to us, is of great significance. It should literally read, "Looking AWAY unto Jesus". This naturally implies that in order to look away unto Jesus, there is something we must look away from. And that something is self. Christ must so completely fill our vision that we have no time to waste on self.

We are instructed in II Cor. 3:18, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord". It seems very plain to us that the one and only way to Christlikeness is to behold, not our old nature, which is corrupt according to its deceitful lusts, but the glory of the Lord. There is a powerful principle implied here of which we should be acutely aware, and it is that WE BECOME WHAT WE BEHOLD. If we spend the majority of our time looking for, and at the old man of sin in us, shall it not be said that we will grow increasingly more like him? On the other hand, if we devote ourselves to beholding the glory of the Lord that has been revealed, that is, to meditating on His goodness and mercy, and all that characterizes Him in the Word, and ever expecting new glimpses of His glory, we shall steadily and progressively be transformed into His image. Without attention, the old man loses his ability to influence our lives, and hold us in conformity to his image.

### **"...UNTIL THE LORD COME..."**

This brings us to verse 5 of the chapter, and what we believe to be the high pinnacle of Paul's letter to the Corinthians, as well as the converging point with II Thess. 2.

"Therefore judge nothing BEFORE THE TIME, UNTIL THE LORD COME, Who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God" (I Cor. 4:5).

In consideration of all that has preceded this, let us note carefully what is being said. It does not say that we are to excuse ourselves from ever having to make judgments. Those who suppose this do greatly err. Rather, we are to judge nothing, absolutely NOTHING (not ourselves, not others, not any situation), BEFORE THE TIME. Before WHAT time? Before the Lord come! For as soon as the Lord comes, it immediately becomes HIS DAY. Anything BEFORE "that time" would still be considered by the Lord to be MAN'S DAY, and based on man's judgment. It is of this that we are to beware.

At the risk of sounding redundant, we will say it again: the reference here to the "coming" of the Lord cannot be referring to a singular event away off in the dim and distant future, when Jesus comes to "rapture" the saints out of this troubled world of sin and woe. If this were the case, Paul's words could rightfully be used as an argument for pluralism; that we should never pass judgment, never render any verdict, never oppose another view, or ever accept anything as being absolute and final, as long as we are in the world. But this cannot be so, since such a position would have made the very gospel Paul preached impotent (by robbing it of its power of exclusiveness. Wouldn't the modernists love that!) Nay, instead, this phrase, "until the Lord come", is used only in the present and imperfect tense, and is used here in the present indicative (meaning, in the act of...). It speaks of an event that is taking place even now; the progressive and ongoing appearing of the Lord, as He has revealed Himself to mankind and individuals throughout history. There has been so much preaching on the "second coming" of Christ (which terminology is never used in Scripture, by the way), it has left the impression that there are but two times the Lord has purposed to "shew Himself alive after His passion": one is past, and the other is future. Now, unless you are of the "pre-tribulational rapture" persuasion, this kind of leaves the here-and-now devoid of any sense of expectation of His appearing, doesn't it? But the truth is, He has come, He is come, and He is to come! It speaks, in a general sense, of all the instances (past, present, and future) when the Lord has seen fit to step on the scene (in whatever form He has chosen to take), and illumine the situation at hand. And it speaks particularly of those innumerable occasions when the Lord reveals Himself and His mind to His saints, many times throughout the day! In this regard we can honestly say, He might come at any moment!

This brings another matter to mind. When we speak of the Lord's "coming", this is not to imply that He is currently apart from us, or that His coming involves the traveling of space or distance. Because some among us still think of the Lord Jesus in physical terms only, they have the mistaken idea that He is presently on a "planet" called "heaven", awaiting His return to earth; and that, in order for Him to come to us, He must do so by way of the Milky Way! Laugh if you must; but this is exactly how they have been taught to envision things. However, it is a verifiable fact according to God's Own Word that HE IS WITH US NOW. It was Christ Himself Who told us that He would never leave us, nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5); and that He would be with us always, even unto the end of the world (Matt. 28:20). Regardless of our spiritual or geographical location, we can always

be assured of this (Psa. 139). Indeed, "in Him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:27, 28. See also Jer. 23:23, 24). This attests to His OMNIPRESENCE. Because Jesus returned unto Spirit ("the glory of the Father") after the resurrection, He is henceforth able to be everywhere at all times. This is basic Christian doctrine, and a cardinal belief of the faith.

However, every student of Scripture should distinguish between His ABIDING PRESENCE and His MANIFEST PRESENCE. There IS a difference, you know!

His abiding presence is that sense in which He is here, whether we feel Him or not. Like the air that envelops this planet, and fills our lungs, His Spirit is all around us, and in us, even though we are not always mindful of that fact. As you know, He oftentimes dwells in thick clouds and in darkness, taking up residence in the "shadowland" of obscurity. This requires us to accept His presence by faith, and take Him at His Word, though "He is not far from any one of us". But His manifest presence might best be understood by those times when He makes Himself known IN EXPERIENTIAL REALITY. There is no denying His presence then!

It is in this sense that we are to understand the reference, "until the Lord come". It is when He steps out from behind the veil, and into full view of those to whom He would reveal Himself. This is precisely how we are to understand the phrase, "the brightness of His coming". The word translated "brightness" in the KJV is the Greek "epiphanea", meaning "manifestation", while the word "coming" is "parousea", meaning "presence". Ah, beloved, when the Lord shows up, EVERYTHING is manifest! It is seen in the light of His glory!

We might wonder why the Lord doesn't just manifest His presence at all times. That would certainly seem to answer all our problems, wouldn't it? However, we should know that it is just as important for the time being that He withdraw Himself from the realm of our human conscious from time to time, as it is for Him to be manifest. You see, this periodic sense of His absence creates the perfect "classroom" environment for Him to humble us, to prove us, and to show us all that is in our hearts, whether we will keep His commandments or not (Deut. 8:2). And it provides opportunity for certain things to come out into the open, whereas they otherwise would have remained hidden (i.e. characteristics of the man of sin). "And now ye know what withholdeth, that he might be revealed in his time". He steps behind the glass, that He might measure our progress. Then He confronts us with the test results, so that, with His help, we might deal with our problem areas (not only will He ask the questions in their proper time and sequence, but will also go over the answers with us, to make sure that we understand).

We realize there is much more to be said on this; but that conveys the general idea. Therefore, to summarize our thoughts thus far, we are to judge nothing BEFORE THE TIME, until the Lord come, seeing that it is God's will to reveal the man of sin IN HIS TIME. We are to wait patiently for the witness of the Spirit, rejecting the tendency to pass premature judgments in accordance with man's day. When once we sense that the Lord is come, and we have crossed "THE TIME LINE", we may know of a surety that

THE TIME IS COME for judgment to begin in the house of God! At such time, the Day of the Lord begins for us; and that wicked one, along with his assumed wisdom, is judged by the fiery breath of divine inspiration, and destroyed by the bright manifestation of Christ's presence. In practical terms, He brings to light the hidden things of darkness, and makes manifest the counsels of men's hearts...and then every man has praise of God! Hallelujah!

to be continued...

***GOOD SEED PUBLICATIONS***

c/o Terry & Tykie Crisp  
672 Goodman Rd.  
Dawson, GA USA 31742