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The Kindness, Humility and Patience of Love.

“God is love.” (1 John 4:7-21.)

(Convention Address)

IN the Scriptures the word love is used to express the complete whole of the grand and glorious qualities which make up the perfection of our Heavenly Father. God is the personification of love. To whatever extent anyone possesses this quality of love, to that extent he has character-likeness to God. Whoever is fully in God's likeness may be said to be love; for love is the great principle which represents most fully the divine character.

“God is love,” our Lord Jesus is love, and when the church is perfect, each member of the body will also be love. This great principle will have full control of all that we do and say, even as now it has control in the hearts of the Lord's people, despite the weaknesses of the flesh which prevent its full expression. When all the imperfections are taken away, those who attain the prize of our glorious high calling will have the image of God, the image of the Lord. The hope of attaining the likeness of the divine character is the great ambition which inspires us to faithfulness of endeavour.

Incidentally, it may be remarked that faith, hope and love are fruits of the holy spirit. Although every good and perfect gift comes from the Father (James 1:17), nevertheless, there is a difference between a “gift” and a “fruit.” Possession of a gift may be acquired immediately, but a fruit requires time in which to develop. So with the fruits of the holy spirit.

Here we see displayed the wisdom of God. Development is a gradual work. With those who have that earnest desire and determined zeal for righteousness which God wishes them to have, every word and every act has something to do with the development of this quality of love. Our Heavenly Father does not expect us to acquire perfection of love in the flesh, for its weaknesses and imperfections will not permit us to do so; but He expects to find in those who will be members of the body of Christ that earnestness of spirit and faithful endeavour which demonstrates that if they had perfect bodies they would always manifest love.

In order to reach this degree of development of character, we must train our minds to desire only those things which are true, pure, loving and good. We must not live after the flesh. We must resist the tendencies of the flesh, and cultivate the new mind. In this sense of the word we are to be copies of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Kindness Not Always Love.

The followers of Christ have consecrated their own wills and have been begotten of the holy spirit, which is the spirit of love, for it is the spirit of God, who is love. Therefore their sentiment toward one another must be one of loving interest. Perhaps we are not always wise in knowing how to exercise loving-kindness; sometimes our fallen nature may lead us to think that a certain course of action would be the loving one, when it is the very reverse —the wrong course. Hence, we need to be on the alert to perceive to what extent we are using the spirit of a sound mind in our conduct and in our dealings with one another.

A person might manifest kindness in word and act without having the right motive. Sometimes kindness is prompted by motives other than love. It might be for selfish reasons, or for the purpose of entrapping another to his disadvantage. This form of fraud has become so common as to call for no particular comment.

The Christian's experience is a continual schooling. Daily we are learning more and more about ourselves and about

the wisdom and justice of God. As we learn these lessons day by day, we are learning more to reprobate and correct in ourselves. In thus discovering our own imperfections, we should learn, as a matter of course, not to expect perfection in others; and we should give them credit for doing their best to exemplify the highest ideals which they have with respect to the unity and perfection required for membership in the body of Christ.

Love is always kind; love cannot wilfully injure another. The parent who loves his child will not do anything to injure that child. He might sometimes make a mistake and punish the child unjustly, but the motive behind a loving parent's action will always be kind and true.

Love might sometimes be regarded as unkind, for the principles governing the actions of the individual might be misunderstood. When our Heavenly Father forbade Adam and Eve to partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, He had a wise reason for doing so. No doubt he would have eventually permitted them to partake of that fruit, but it was kindness on His part to keep them in ignorance of that fact. Thinking God to be unkind, ungenerous toward them, Eve thought to obtain her rights: So with us. If our Heavenly Father's kindness is not always understood, we may not be surprised if we have a similar experience. Although our spirit, or motive, may be right, yet we may not always have the ability to manifest it; and so we must make due allowance when others misunderstand us.

The Power of Indwelling Love.

Man was originally made in the image of God, but by reason of the fall of Adam, his balance of mind has been destroyed. Those who have the mind, or will of Christ are able to overcome some of the inequalities of their natural disposition and to think soberly of their own knowledge and ignorance and of that of others. This ability to appreciate the true state of affairs is the secret of much of our blessing in the Lord.

When we see others who have a smaller appreciation of justice than we have and who do things contrary to the principles of righteousness, we rejoice that we know better and are able to do a little better than they. The spirit of a sound mind shows us that we have more ability along some lines than have some others, and that others have more ability along some lines than we. Because of the fall of man, all are weak in one direction or another. The knowledge of the imperfect condition of humanity should humble us rather than puff us up.

Humility of mind comes only after the attainment of considerable knowledge of Christ. Knowledge puffs up because of selfishness of heart, because we are more likely to be conscious of our own good qualities than of those of others. Hence, those born with less selfishness have less to contend with, and those born with more of it have more to contend with; and in proportion as we have the spirit of Christ, we are able to overcome the tendency to be puffed up with what little knowledge we possess. Indwelling love has the power to build up, to strengthen character, and to counteract the wrong effect of the fallen human nature.

Proper and Improper Causes of Provocation.

The whole world has a tendency to recognise the principles of justice. Even those whose conduct towards others is far from just seem to crave an opportunity to fight against injustice, provided that the case is not one with which they are identified. This inclination often manifests itself in acts of violence, as when mobs vent their anger against some poor sinner who has done something to provoke their wrath. The least virulent amongst them have perhaps done wrong also, yet they seize the opportunity to show their indignation against wrongdoing and seem to take delight in punishing the offender.

The Lord's people should not possess this spirit of intolerance. We should have patience, sympathy and endurance when things go wrong, and should make due allowance for those who are transgressors. The more we possess of the spirit of patience, the more we have of the spirit of forbearance, the more difficult it is to arouse us to anger. Wherever the spirit of love prevails, its possessor is not easily moved to do or say anything unkind or unjust. Love makes us very patient with those with whom we are associated; it is anxious to throw the mantle of charity over everything that seems to be wrong.

Love would have us remember that while another may be in error, it does not follow that he is at fault. He may not have understood a matter correctly or his judgment may not have been the best, owing to inherited weakness over which he has no control. Before condemning anyone we should make sure that he is at fault. Justice demands that we do no less than investigate before we condemn. Love urges us to be as merciful in the case as possible.

God is the very personification of love, yet the Scriptures tell us that He has been provoked at different times. While passing through the wilderness, the children of Israel aroused His indignation repeatedly. (Psa. 78:40, 56; 95:7-11.)

The idolatrous tendencies of that nation brought divine wrath upon them and sent them into captivity to Babylon. (Jer. 7:17-20.) Finally, their rejection and crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ brought upon them “wrath to the uttermost” and caused their dispersion into all parts of the earth.

Righteous Indignation a Proper Feeling.

The Lord’s people are not to be of that immovable kind that cannot feel any resentment of injustice. Lack of ability to have just indignation would imply lack of morals and of harmony with God. Of our Lord Jesus it is written that when He beheld the unrighteous condition of the rulers of His people, and saw the injustice of their conduct, He “looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.” (Mark 3:5.) Like Him, we should be wholly out of sympathy with everything not in harmony with God.

We are to love righteousness and hate iniquity. This word iniquity, which means the very opposite of love, is a strong expression. A person who is indifferent to matters of right and wrong is indifferent to the character of God, who is in opposition to all forms of iniquity. Of our Lord the Scriptures say, “Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness; therefore, God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” (Psa. 45:7.) All who are cultivating character pleasing to God, all who are endeavouring to become exact copies of His dear Son, should put away every impurity, everything not right. Whatever is wrong should always be opposed by our new minds.

On the other hand, if we have love as the Lord has it, we shall hate the wrong, but not the individual that does the wrong. In proportion as love controls our hearts and minds, we shall feel sympathy for those who are in iniquity, for we remember that the race of mankind is fallen from the original perfection. We should think that to do evil is not their intention, their will, but that they are suffering from iniquitous disease. Love is patient and tries to find extenuating circumstances and conditions. It seeks to help the evildoers and is not easily provoked to anger.

But the word “provoke” signifies to incite to. In another place the Apostle says, “Provoke one another to love and good works.” (Heb. 10:24.) Love should say and do those things that will incite to loving words rather than stir up bitterness, which leads to anger, wrath, malice, strife and evil-speaking. (Eph. 4:32.) In other words, it is much better to be a peacemaker than a strife-maker. Yet we are not to have peace at any price; rather, we should have peace if possible, where principle is not involved. We should stir up strife only where some good is sure to result.

The degree of love, the strength of love, may be determined by the ease with which it may be swerved and aroused to opposition or to impatience and anger. We have already seen that there may be times when patience might stand in the way of the real interests of the case and where love would take steps to correct what seemed to be an apparent evil; but we must remember that balance of mind, or judgment, is not ours by nature. Perfection of decision is a quality belonging only to our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Let patience have her perfect work.” (James 1:4.) The Father would not be provoked to anger with anything trivial. With us, however, our balance of judgment is so poor that generally we are too hasty. Very few of us take in the full circumstances surrounding ourselves and those with whom we have to do; therefore growth in grace and growth in knowledge will have to do with the degree of love exhibited by each one.

Generosity and Sympathy to be Cultivated.

We are in the school of Christ, with the Great Teacher. We have the words of the Heavenly Father, of our Lord Jesus and of the Apostles recorded in the Bible; therefore we should know the difference between right and wrong. On the other hand, we see that sin exists in the world. Mankind are imperfect in mind and morals. This condition is hereditary — the result of Adam’s transgression nearly six thousand years ago. Yet, with all our advantages of knowledge, we “cannot do the things that we would”; consequently, we feel a measure of sympathy for ourselves, and we should extend the same to others. Indeed, we should be more critical of ourselves than of others, although the Lord’s Word says that we are not to condemn either ourselves or others. We cannot read the hearts of those around us and therefore are not competent to decide what motives prompt their actions, nor what degree of punishment should be meted out to them.

Nevertheless, we are to observe right and wrong conduct among our neighbours. We may know that they have, figuratively speaking, a bad tree and therefore bring forth bad fruit; and we should consider why they have a tree that produces such fruitage. Perhaps they were less favorably born than we. Perhaps they have never been in the school of Christ and have never heard the Great Teacher or the Apostles. If so, our sympathy should go out to them and our attitude of mind toward them should be such that we will not be provoked by their shortcomings, but should manifest generosity of heart toward them.

To attain this sympathy and generosity is a part of our instruction in the school of Christ, but we do not learn all pertaining to the subject in a day or a week. We get “here a little, there a little.” (Isa. 28:10.) If we are following on to know the Lord, our mental discernment will become clearer and our minds and hearts will broaden in sympathy for others. Thus we shall become more like our Father in heaven, for He is kind to the unthankful and just to the unjust, as our Lord pointed out. (Matt. 5:44-48.)

Pride a Cause of Much Irritability.

Undoubtedly the causes for irritability and for being provoked vary in different persons. With some, it is because of a nervous condition of health, which renders them less easily able to control themselves according to the standards which they themselves recognise. With others, the cause of irritability is pride. In fact, pride is connected with nearly everything that is injurious to the people of God. Wherever pride exists, the person is susceptible to evil influences from every quarter.

Pride manifests itself in various ways. Sometimes it manifests itself as self-esteem, leading one to think too highly of himself and too lightly of others, even to the extent of imagining himself to be their superior. At other times, pride manifests itself as approbateness; anything that conflicts with the desire to appear well before others touches a tender spot.

We are not to be indifferent to these things. If we have pride or approbateness, we are to seek to control it with the spirit of love and sympathy for others, instead of letting the wrong spirit control us. The best way to do this is to practise generosity and to provoke others to love and good works instead of to anger. Let us remember that humility is one of the great lessons, one of the most important lessons to be learned in the school of Christ; obedience to the instructions of the Teacher along this line has very much to do with our ever getting into the kingdom.

One of the best aids to the learning of this important lesson is to learn to judge ourselves—to scrutinise our own motives. If we find that we have acted unjustly toward another, we should go and make amends to the best of our ability; we should properly scourge our own minds, and seek to make matters right with the one we have wronged.

For a person who is proud, or who is sensitive to the good opinion of others, it is very difficult to apologize; but the best thing to do is to set the matter right as speedily as possible, and repeatedly, if necessary. Thus we may have help along the line where we should have it, by overcoming our pride and vanity.

The members of the body of Christ are all to be copies of God’s dear Son. This does not mean that God’s dear people will be able always to control their looks and words and actions, but that the heart must recognise this standard and strive to attain it. Every time a person who has some weakness along this line of pride or vanity will apologise for a wrong done, he will by that act show both God and man that his heart recognises the right principle. A great blessing will come to him because of his following very strictly the divine Word; thus he will gradually overcome his weakness and strengthen his character.

Feet-washing as a Lesson in Humility.

On the last night He was with them our Lord gave to the disciples, and to all the church, a valuable lesson in humility. He waited until supper was being served (not ended as in the A.V.); then, arising from the table, He laid aside His mantle and got a basin and a towel and proceeded to wash their feet. This act was a pointed reproof for their neglect to wash His feet and one another’s. When our Lord came to him, Peter said, “Thou shalt never wash my feet.” Peter had too much reverence to wish the Lord to be his servant. But the Lord said to him, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” What I am doing you do not understand now, but you shall understand hereafter. (See John 13:7-10.)

In all this the Lord was giving a deep spiritual lesson—that no one is naturally fit for the kingdom. Each one needs to be washed, to be cleansed, before he can be a joint-heir. Jesus said to His disciples, You have witnessed My humility in this matter, and now I want to tell you that you ought to have this attitude toward one another. You should have been careful for even the humblest one in your number.

The incident affords a lesson in humility to us as well as it afforded one to the apostles. We should be glad to do any service, even to the humblest of the members of Christ, in whatever way the opportunity may come.

Our Responsibility to One Another.

This lesson suggests that the members of Christ’s body should have a mutual watch-care for one another’s welfare; to keep each other pure, holy, clean and to assist one another in overcoming the trials, temptations and besetments which

come from the world, the flesh and the devil. Only as we cultivate the various graces of the spirit—meekness, gentleness, patience, brotherly-kindness, love—can we hope to be helpful to others in putting on these adornments of character and purities of life, and in getting rid of the defilements of the world and the flesh.

It requires peculiar qualifications to enable us to assist each other in this respect. Before we can help others to cleanse their way of life in every little particular, so that every thought, word and deed shall be brought into subjection to the divine will, it is necessary that we have experience along the same lines. Only as we cultivate purity of thought, word and deed in our own lives, only as we put on the various graces of the spirit, can we wash the feet of the saints.

Many who would reject well-meant criticism of conduct, who would resent well-meant offers of assistance to a higher standard of character, as interferences with their private affairs, would be very amenable to the influence of the same person if he approached them with such evidences of true devotion and loving interest as would be indicated by the performance of some menial act. It is the sympathetic ones who are the most successful in helping the various members of the body of Christ out of the besetments and difficulties incident to the following of the Lord in the present time. Oh, how we should study and strive and pray that we may be very successful in obeying the Master's injunction, "Ye ought also to wash one another's feet."

How many opportunities we have for comforting, refreshing, consoling and assisting one another in some of the humblest affairs of daily living, or in respect of some of the unpleasant duties, experiences or trials of life ! By love we are to serve one another, but not as a mere formality. Any service done or attempted to be done in love with the desire to do good to one of the Lord's people has, we may be sure, the approval of the Head of the church.

Let us lose no opportunities of this kind; let us remember the Master's example. Let us not merely assume the guise of humility, but let us actually have that grace of character which will enable us to do kindnesses and service to all with whom we come in contact. Then we shall all the more enjoy this privilege as we find the needy ones to be members of the body of Christ.

Thou sweet, beloved Will of God,
My anchor ground, my fortress hill,
My spirit's silent, fair abode,
In Thee I hide me, and am still.

O Will, that wiltest good alone,
Lead thou the way, Thou guidest best;
A little child I follow on,
And trusting lean upon Thy breast.

Thy beautiful, sweet Will, my God,
Holds fast in its sublime embrace
My captive will, a gladsome bird,
Prisoned in such a realm of grace.

Within this place of certain good,
Love evermore expands her wings;
Or, nestling in Thy perfect choice,
Abides content with what it brings.

Oh, sweetest burden, lightest yoke,
It lifts, it bears my happy soul,
It giveth wings to this poor heart;
My freedom is Thy grand control.

Upon God's Will I lay me down,
As child upon its mother's breast;
No silken couch, nor softest bed,
Could ever give me such rest.

Thy wonderful, grand Will, my God,
With triumph now, I make it mine,
And love shall cry a joyous Yes,
To every dear command of Thine.

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Fear Not Little Flock.

Luke 12:32.

WHAT endearing words, so sweet, so simple, so full of meaning and what comfort they bring to the heart in this day of fear! They remind us of a mother, who, hearing a cry in the night, rises swiftly to tend the one she loves. Taking the trembling one in her arms and telling it to fear not, she rocks it to sleep on her breast.

How many times we are told in the Scriptures to fear not, and our Saviour must have realised the great power fear would have over the human mind when He told His little band of faithful followers so many times to fear not.

From whence comes fear, and what makes one fear? The first intimation we have of fear in the Bible is where Adam and his wife hid themselves in the Garden of Eden. So we see that fear comes from a knowledge of sin. Once sin enters the heart we fear. Job, in ch. 11:14, 15, says: "Put iniquity away . . . and thou shalt not fear." When iniquity leaves the heart fear departs with it.

What a persistent and formidable foe is fear. It attacks from every direction. It is the imp and progeny of sin, and where it hides the child of God may be sure that the Adversary is working very hard to stumble the unsuspecting one. Nevertheless, a godly fear is necessary in the composition of a true Christian character, for the child of God must fear to do evil, to wound the feelings of a brother, and should reverence and fear God. Fear makes a splendid watchdog, which should warn if any evil approaches the heart, but it should never repose in the heart.

How strange that in a day of full and plenty, with garner of wheat overflowing, fat cattle and sheep by the million, fruit weighing the branches to the ground, grapes in abundance in a land flowing with milk and honey, and everything that should gladden the heart of man, that fear grips the heart, leaving a dreadful feeling of unrest and insecurity.

Never in our lives do we need faith and perfect trust in God more than we need it today. Men seem to have lost faith in God, and evil and vice abound. What a vivid picture St. Paul paints of the men of today, when he declares that they would wax worse and worse; that in the last days trying times should come, for men would be lovers of self, money-lovers, boasters, haughty, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable, accusers, without self-control, ferocious, rash, self-conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than God, having a form of piety but denying the power thereof; and from all such he exhorts us to turn away.

O, the blessedness and peace that reigns in the heart of the children of God, who look to the Father with the faith of a little child, never doubting that the Divine hand that has supplied the wants of today, will also provide the needs of tomorrow! As the mother runs to the aid of her sick child, even so, God will come quickly to the aid of those who call upon Him, and His best gifts are to those who have perfect faith and implicit trust in Him. Our Saviour teaches this lesson. When He was with His disciples on the lake of Galilee, a storm arose, lashing the waves to fury; and in the midst of the tempest the boat had sprung a leak and the disciples were in great peril. In fear and dismay they ran to our Saviour and found Him sleeping peacefully. They awakened Him, saying, "Master, Master, we perish." Then, arising, He rebuked the wind and the raging of the water, and there was a great calm. And He said unto them, "Where is your faith?" In this case the disciples' fear was caused by a want of faith. Had they had perfect faith in their Master, they, too, could have slept peacefully and would have known no fear.

The Psalmist gives us a splendid pen picture of that storm in the words, "They that go down to the sea in ships and occupy their business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep. For he commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths. They reel and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble and He delivers them out of their distress. He maketh the storm a calm so that the waves thereof are still" (Psa. 107:23-29). It may be that our Saviour had previously been discussing these powerful words of the Psalmist, and to try the effect of His teachings and to test their faith had permitted the rising of the storm. Even so it is today, amid all the

gathering gloom and the banking of the storm clouds, when men stagger and reel under the power of the Divine hand.

Although the storms are of a different character, they are purposely sent by God to try our faith, and to see if we have perfect faith and implicit trust in Him. O, if we could only have that sweet love and trust in God, which even little children teach us every day by their confiding faith in us.

We see many instances where our Lord tested His disciples and gave them warnings. After Peter had made his avowal of love, our Lord had warned him that he would deny Him, and we all know the result. Jesus, revealing Himself to St. Paul on the road to Damascus, told him plainly that he would suffer many things for His Name's sake. And as we follow the Apostle Paul in all his wanderings, we see him buffeted from pillar to post, and treated by some as the scum of the earth. We follow him to prison, and in depths oft, five times he received forty stripes save one, thrice he was beaten with rods, once stoned, thrice shipwrecked, in perils often, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, and yet, in spite of all this formidable list of fears and sufferings he counts them all as light afflictions. So real was his faith, so great his love and loyalty to his Master, that fear could find no place in that noble heart. We realise that the many things he suffered acted as the chisel of persecution that shaped that noble character into a gem of loveliness, which has so endeared him to all believers.

As we look back over the mist of years and recall the wondrous words of the Apostle which have shed a halo of glory around the cross of Christ, reaching numberless hearts, stimulating and comforting, and leaving an impression which is the reflex of Christ's glorious character, let us step forward bravely and courageously into the future, and "fear not."

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Christ's Spirit of Comfort and His Second Presence.

THERE appears to be a difficulty with some I to discern the difference between the Lord's being with His Church throughout the Gospel Age, and His presence as Lord of the Harvest at the end of the Age—His parousia—unseen by man and discerned only by the eye of faith, as the signs of His presence are observable.

The Lord Jesus has certainly been with His suffering saints ever since Pentecost. He has so closely identified Himself with the members of His Body that He said to the man who went "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples," "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." "For by one spirit we are all baptised into one Body. All made to drink into one spirit" (1 Cor. 12), so that Christ is represented in His Body-members on earth, in whom the holy spirit operates. "He who receiveth you receiveth Me, and he who receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me." These have the privilege of suffering with Christ, of filling up the afflictions of Christ which are left over, so that *we* might be dead with Him and so might live with Him.

Our Lord is represented in Rev. 1:13, and 2:1, as "He that walketh amidst the candlesticks" and as being thoroughly acquainted with the varied conditions and circumstances of His Church—"I know thy works." He is ever with His people in their trials, and renders aid by His spirit, through the Word of God, and through His people, sending comfort and strength in time of need.

This was His promise when taking leave of the disciples—"I will not leave you comfortless. I will pray the Father and He shall give you another comforter that may abide with you for ever." "He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." "But the Comforter—the holy spirit which the Father will send in My name—shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." "But when the comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, he shall testify of Me."—John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26.

It is in this way that the Lord has been with His people, sustaining them in trial, adversity, persecution and distress, by bringing to their remembrance His love, His care, His interest in their progress, and the many exceeding great and precious promises of grace to help.

As the young nobleman in the parable, our Lord went to a far country, to the heavenly courts, to receive the Kingdom, and then to return, to come again and receive His Church unto Himself, that where He is there they may be also. Then He will take His great power and order righteousness and peace in the earth.

Before dealing with mankind generally, the Scriptures clearly show that the first work of Christ on His return is in connection with His Church, and for this purpose He must be present for a season, "as a thief in the night," unknown to the world. Gradually His presence would be made known to the watching saints—those who, when they hear the "knock" indicating His presence, open their hearts to welcome their Lord and He enters and sups with them, and they with Him (Rev. 3:20). Those who do not hear the knock and those who hear, but fail to open, are left in ignorance of the second presence of the Lord.

The discourse in Matt. 24 shows that there is the work of harvest to be first attended to, a gathering of the elect.

The Lord of the Harvest will say to the reapers, "Tie the tares in bundles, but gather the wheat into the garner." True Christians are to be separated from the false and gathered home into the antitypical ark, into Christ, beyond the veil, and the burning up of the bundles of tares takes place in the "time of trouble such as never has been since there was a nation, nor ever shall be."

The world will be in ignorance of the fact that Christ has returned until this preparatory work in connection with the Church and the closing of the Gospel Age has been accomplished. "As the days of Noah were, so shall also the days of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away, so shall also the presence of the Son of Man be" (Matt. 24:37-39). It would seem to be difficult to make it plainer that there would be "days of the Son of Man"—a time during which the Lord would be present, dealing with His people and preparing for their deliverance, but unrecognised by the world. He would come "as a thief," unawares.

The parables in Matt. 25 illustrate the matters dealt with in the 24th chapter. The parable of the virgins shows that only the watchers would know of the Lord's coming, and that even among them some should fail to be properly prepared. It shows a separating work, which is still in process. The varied experiences of the harvest period continue to separate the foolish virgins from the wise. When all the wise virgins are gathered the door will be shut.

