

Complete U-turn to God

What is a true conversion?

“How ye turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to await his Son from the heavens, whom he raised from among the dead, Jesus, our deliverer from the coming wrath” (1 Thessalonians 1 v.9 & 10).

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Complete U-turn

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*“How ye **turned to God from idols to serve** a living and true God, and **to await** his Son from the heavens, whom he raised from among the dead, Jesus, our deliverer from the coming wrath” (1 Thessalonians 1 v.9-10).*

What is a conversion?

This is a serious and extremely important question! In this day and age, there is a great deal of superficiality and frivolity surrounding matters relating to our relationship with God. That is precisely why it is so important to know the answer straight *from God*.

The answer of the Scriptures

“Ye turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to await his Son from the heavens, whom he raised from among the dead, Jesus, our deliverer from the coming wrath” (1 Thessalonians 1 v.9-10).

1- Conversion is a necessity

It hardly needs to be said that we believe in the ***unconditional necessity of true conversion***. Whether someone is Jewish or Gentile, whether they live their life as a Muslim, Hindu or Christian, whether they are registered as Protestant or Catholic, whatever their nationality and ecclesiastical position, and whatever profession of faith they adhere to, they must go

through conversion. Otherwise, they are on the broad path to eternal judgement (Revelation 20 v.11-16).

No one is born a Christian, in the sense of the word as defined in the Bible. Even less so does anyone become a Christian because their parents are Christians or because of the education they have received. It is a teaching containing deadly poison, and a refined deception from Satan, to lead someone to believe that they can become a Christian by birth or education, or even that they can become one through a religious ceremony such as baptism. A person only becomes a Christian when he/she is converted in a divine manner.

It is on the subject of 'what this conversion consists of' that we hope to provide food for thought. But first and foremost, we want to draw attention to the urgent and absolute necessity of a genuine conversion to God.

Man is an immortal being; his soul is immortal. He is on his way to an endless eternity. What is the greatest folly anyone can commit? It is to neglect the serious question of his conversion and to try to forget it or at least to downplay its importance. Given the extreme importance of this subject, everything else is much less important. The many things that occupy people's minds and demand all their time, attention and

strength, the countless things to which poor and dissatisfied hearts aspire and cling - all this is like morning mist dispelled by the sun. It is like the foam on the waves, like smoke rising from a chimney: it passes away and leaves only a sterile emptiness in the heart. The heart remains unsatisfied and the soul is not saved.

And then what? Yes, what next? A terrifying question. What is the end of all this agitation, this struggle for prestige and honour, this thirst for money and pleasure? Ah, man will meet death. *“It is the portion of men once to die”* (Hebrews 9 v.27). There are no exceptions, no escape. All the treasures of the universe cannot give even a moment's respite from this merciless enemy. The greatest skill of doctors and the most tender care of loving parents or friends cannot prevent this dreaded moment. Their tears, sighs and lamentations cannot persuade this king of terrors to sheathe his terrible sword. This king spares no one. He stands menacingly before every unconverted person, whether man, woman or child.

And when death comes, what happens then? People readily imagine that after death, there is total annihilation. That is why they cry out: *“Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die”* (1 Corinthians 15 v.32). How vain it is to be so mistaken! It is a

foolish dream born of human imagination; it shows that man has been blinded by the god of this world, the devil. How could an immortal soul be destroyed? It was with an eternal spirit that man entered the Garden of Eden. *“And Jehovah Elohim formed Man, dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and Man became a living soul”* (Genesis 2 v.7). The soul must live forever. Whether converted or not, everyone has eternity before them. Yes, this is of overwhelming significance and far-reaching implications!

What do the Holy Scriptures teach about what happens after death? A single line from the Scriptures is enough to throw ten thousand assertions from human intellectualism overboard. Is death followed by complete annihilation? Absolutely not! *“It is the portion of men once to die, and after this judgment”* (Hebrews 9 v.27). Let us take this very seriously: *“... and after this judgment”*! This last expression applies only to those who die in their sins, that is, unbelievers. For the true Christian, there is no more condemnation. The Scriptures tell us this in countless passages. It is important to pay attention to this, because people sometimes claim that, since life is only in Christ, all will be annihilated except those who are in Him.

This is not what the Word of God says. There is a judgement after death. And what will be the consequence of this judgement? Here again, it is the Scriptures that tell us in words as clear as they are solemn: *“And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled, and place was not found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is that of life. And the dead were judged out of the things written in the books according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and hades (*) gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged each according to their works: and death and hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, even the lake of fire. And if any one was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire”* (Revelation 20 v.11-15).

(*) Hades is the invisible place where the souls of men go after death; it is distinct from Gehenna, the place of hellish torment.

All this is as clear as words can make it. There is no room for doubt or uncertainty. For all those whose names are written in the book of life, there is certainly no judgement. Those whose names are not written in this book will be judged according to

their works. And what will be their fate? Annihilation? Oh no! But rather the lake of fire, eternal punishment.

This thought is terrifying! It should cause everyone to think seriously about how urgent and imperative it is to convert to God. For conversion is the only way to escape eternal judgement. Unconverted persons, whoever they may be, must expect death, judgement and the lake of fire. Every beat of their pulse brings them closer to this terrible reality. And if their name is not written in the book of life, if they have not repented and are not in Christ, it is absolutely certain that they will be judged according to their works. The inevitable result will be that the lake of fire, the burning lake of fire and brimstone, will be their eternal fate.

Perhaps some are surprised that we are dwelling so long on this frightening subject. Perhaps they are asking themselves, ‘Will this lead people to repentance?’ Perhaps not, but it may lead them to see that repentance is necessary. By God's grace, it may open their eyes to the terrible danger they are in. Why did the Lord Jesus so often emphasise the serious reality of eternity to his listeners? Why did he often remind them, speaking of man and hell, that “their worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9 v.44, 46, 48)? No doubt to awaken them to the

danger that threatened them and to urge them to flee to the only place where they could find refuge. Are we wiser than He? Would we shrink from the fear of seriously warning our fellow human beings about this reality of extreme importance? Should we, for fear of offending the ears of a cultured and developed world, hesitate to declare openly and unequivocally that, without exception, all those who die unconverted will one day stand before the great white throne and their eternal destiny will be to be in the lake of fire? May God preserve us from this! We appeal to all unconverted people with these words: “Think carefully about the most important question concerning the salvation of your soul!” In no way should you be deceived into putting it off until later or not paying enough attention to it! *“For what does a man profit, if he should gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (Matthew 16 v.26)

Conversion is therefore absolutely necessary. For those who bow to the holy authority of God's Word, there is no difficulty or doubt about this. *“Unless ye are converted and become as little children, ye will not at all enter into the kingdom of the heavens”* (Matthew 18 v.3). This passage of Scripture applies in all its moral force to every son and daughter, descendants of Adam, the first man who fell into sin. There is not a single ex-

ception among all the billions of people who have ever lived on earth or who currently live on earth. It is impossible to enter the kingdom of heaven without an inner change, without **conversion**. Every unconverted person is outside the kingdom of God. It has nothing to do with 'who I am' or 'what I am.' If I am not converted, I am in the kingdom of darkness, under the power of Satan, in my sins, and on the road to hell.

Perhaps I am someone with an unblemished reputation, known to be blameless. Perhaps I am a learned professor of theology or a "worker in God's vineyard", a preacher, a deacon, an elder or a Sunday school teacher. Perhaps I have many charitable works to my credit, and give large sums of money to all kinds of good causes of a religious or social nature. Perhaps I am generally held in high esteem and praised for my personal worth and moral influence. I may be and do all these things. I may possess all the good qualities a person can have — and yet not be converted and therefore find myself outside the kingdom of heaven, but rather in the kingdom of Satan and on the road that ends in the lake of fire and brimstone.

The Saviour's words apply with equal force to the drunkard who has fallen into the depths of misery, staggering down the street, as to the unconverted teetotaller who claims not to have

touched alcohol for a long time. They are both equally far from the kingdom of heaven, they are both in sin, they are both on the path to eternal damnation. Perhaps someone has turned away from a life of revelry to a more orderly life – and from a moral and societal point of view, this is something for which one can have respect – but this is not “to turn to God”, converting to God. It is only by “turning to God”, converting to Him, that we are brought into the kingdom of heaven. This conversion is absolutely necessary for both of them. And it applies to all people, regardless of their rank or social class. In this respect, there is no difference. *“Unless ye are converted ... ye will not at all enter into the kingdom of the heavens”*.

That is why the most important question for everybody is: “Am I converted?” No one is able to ask this question with sufficient seriousness and focus. And yet thousands, even millions of people let week after week, year after year pass by without seriously asking themselves this question. Does this not betray the utmost indifference? If someone does not concern themselves with their earthly affairs and allows things to deteriorate, we would certainly reproach them for their serious negligence and carelessness. But what are the most important things in this life compared to eternal salvation and the interests of our immortal souls?

Dear reader, are you converted? A converted person has crossed the dividing line that separates those who are saved from those who are lost, the children of light from the children of darkness, the Assembly (or Church) of God from the corrupt world. The believer has death and judgement behind him and glory before him. He is so sure that one day he will be in heaven, as if he were already there; yes, in spirit, he is already there. There is an undeniable right. He knows Christ as his Saviour, God as his Father, the Holy Spirit as his Comforter and Guide, and heaven as his glorious and happy homeland. Who is able to describe this bliss? *“Things which eye has not seen, and ear not heard, and which have not come into man`s heart, which God has prepared for them that love him, but God has revealed to us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God”* (1 Corinthians 2 v.9-10).

2- To turn ... from idols

*“How ye **turned** to God **from idols** to serve a living and true God, and to await his Son from the heavens.”*

Let us now examine what conversion is. It is very important to obtain an answer based on the Holy Scriptures, the Bible. There are many false answers circulating on this subject. It is precisely because of its immeasurable importance that the enemy of our souls constantly strives to mislead people in every way possible. If he fails to make people indifferent and unconcerned about their conversion, he tries to blind them and hide the true nature of conversion from them.

For example, when a person begins to realise that the pleasures and comforts of the world are fleeting and do not bring real satisfaction, when he/she realises that a change in his/her life is necessary and urgent, the greatest deceiver (Satan) usually tries to persuade them to become religious. This person may then engage in religious precepts, ordinances, and ceremonies. Of course, he/she renounces worldly things: revelry, card games, and all kinds of vices and debauchery. In short, he/she abstains from all forms of worldly pleasures and strives to lead a pious

and honourable life, to observe religious precepts, to read the Bible, to pray, to give money to good causes, etc.

However, this is not true conversion! Someone can do all these things and remain completely unconverted. A religious zealot whose entire life consists of vigils, fasting, prayers, self-flagellation, and good works may well be unconverted and thus just as far removed from the kingdom of God as a frivolous debauchee who goes as far as he can in his debauchery on earth. Undoubtedly, these two characters are very far apart; the difference could not be greater. Yet both are unconverted, both are outside the blessed circle of God's redeemed, both are still in their sins. Certainly, one is engaged in "evil works", while the other is tormented with "dead works", but both are outside of Christ. They are not saved, but on the path to eternal and hopeless misery. Both, if they do not truly turn to God, have their eternal destiny in the burning lake of fire and brimstone.

Moving from one religious system to another is not conversion either. A person may break with Judaism, paganism, Islam or Roman Catholicism and move to Protestantism – and yet be completely unconverted. From a social or moral point of view, it is undoubtedly preferable to be Protestant than Muslim, but both are essentially on the same footing: both individuals are

unconverted. It must be said of both that, unless they are converted, they cannot enter the kingdom of God. Conversion does not depend on a connection to a religious system, however orthodox it may be.

The same applies to theological professions of faith. A person may know these so-called articles by heart, may profess to adhere to the teachings of Luther, Calvin, Wesley or anyone else – and yet be unconverted and dead in their sins and transgressions. What good is a religious system or a profession of faith defined by theology to a person who has no trace of life of God? Religious systems and professions of faith can neither save, justify, nor communicate everlasting life. You can strive, year after year, to do all kinds of Christian things, and still end up back where you started: in dead works. What is the value of all this? What is the end of all this tireless zeal? It is death and a dark and terrible eternity.

It is even possible for someone to have knowledge of the glorious counsels of God's grace, of salvation by faith and justification without works, to confess belief in all these things and rejoice in them, yes, even defend Christian doctrine, either in writing or orally, and be a gifted preacher of the gospel—all this is possible without being truly converted and saved. The

truth has never reached his conscience, never touched his heart. He has only understood it with his intellect. It is difficult to imagine a sadder situation!

I hear my reader asking me: “***But what then is conversion?***”

In chapter 1 of the 1st epistle to the Thessalonians, we find a remarkable explanation of true conversion: “... *they themselves relate concerning us what entering in we had to you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to await his Son from the heavens, whom he raised from among the dead, Jesus, our deliverer from the coming wrath*” (verses 9 & 10).

Here we have God's description of conversion. It is brief but complete in its scope and depth. The believers in Thessalonica had ***turned away from idols***. They had completely broken with the past and turned away from their former life once and for all. They had abandoned all the things that had once dominated their hearts and consumed their strength and energy. They were brought to the point where, in the light of divine truth, they condemned their entire former life. Yes, not only did they condemn it, but they left it behind without hesitation. It was not a half-measure. It was a clearly identifiable moment, a great turning point in their moral and practical lives. It was not just a

change of perspective or an adherence to new principles. It was much more than that. Divine light had shone into their hearts and shown them that their life up to that point had been a horrible deception. As a result, they turned their hearts away entirely from the world, to which, until then, their love had been devoted and which had determined their actions.

What brought about this magnificent change? Quite simply, it was the Word of God that had reached their hearts through the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. Paul himself testifies to this: *“For this cause we also give thanks to God unceasingly that, having received the word of the report of God by us, ye accepted, not men`s word, but, even as it is truly, God`s word, which also works in you who believe”* (chapter 2 v.13). That is the whole secret. The Word of God - and nothing else! - produced, through the power of the Holy Spirit, these great results among the Thessalonians, results that filled the apostle's heart with sincere gratitude. He rejoices that they have been brought into relationship, not with him, but with the living God Himself, and through His Word. This is an unbreakable bond, as firm and unchanging as the Word itself. The word of man passes away, like himself, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. It was as a faithful servant of God that the apostle understood and perceived this. That is why his constant concern was that believers

should not rely on him in any way, and that their trust should not be placed in him, but only in the One of whom he was the messenger and servant.

He addresses the believers in Corinth in the same way: *“And I, when I came to you, brethren, came not in excellency of word, or wisdom, announcing to you the testimony of God. For I did not judge it well to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling; and my word and my preaching, not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith might not stand in men`s wisdom, but in God`s power”* (1 Corinthians 2 v.1-5).

The apostle Paul had proclaimed the Word of God with living power to the Thessalonians, and the Holy Spirit had caused that Word to penetrate their hearts. It fell on good soil, took root, and bore fruit a hundredfold. What was this fruit? *“... they themselves relate concerning us what entering in we had to you, and how ye turned to God from idols”* (1 Thessalonians 1 v.9)

The single word “idols” expresses the whole life of every unconverted man living on earth. To be an idolater, it is not necessary to bow down before a piece of wood or a stone. All those countless and fleeting things that fill the heart of man and dom-

inate him are idols. And he who sets his heart on such things is an idolater. This is clearly stated in the Holy Scriptures.

Let us consider just one sin, the sin of greed (1*), which is so widespread. What name does the apostle give it? He calls it ‘idolatry’ (2*). How many hearts are dominated by money? How many bow down before the golden idols of dust? What is greed? It is first of all the desire to always have more, and then the love of what one already possesses.

(1*) An immoderate desire for riches and possessions

(2*) *“Put to death therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, vile passions, evil lust, and **unbridled desire** [= greed], which is **idolatry**”* (Colossians 3 v.5).

There are two completely different forms of this sin. The desire to possess more and more is often accompanied by the desire to spend. However, the love of money can also be linked to a burning passion to amass and accumulate money. Take, for example, a very skilled businessman. Everything seems to go his way. He is a trader at heart. His only goal is to make money. His capital must grow, his business must expand, his name must be widely known. He may have started his career with only a few pennies in his pocket, but today he is one of the richest men around. He is clearly not stingy. He is just as willing to spend money as he is to accumulate it. In fact, he keeps

it circulating. He is generous and donates large sums to all kinds of events and charitable causes. He is respected by those around him and by all classes of society. But his goal is to always have more. He is a greedy man, an idolater. Perhaps he despises the miser who spends entire nights in front of his safe, staring at his gold with shining eyes, depriving himself and those around him of perhaps the most necessary things so as not to have to take a penny from the treasure he has carefully amassed. He loves money not because it allows him to fulfil all his desires, but solely for the sake of money itself.

These two characters seem very different from each other, yet they stand before God on equal footing, for they covet the same thing: money. They are both idolaters. This may seem harsh and severe, but it is God's truth.

It is truly not easy to convince people of the sin of greed, which the Holy Spirit rightly calls idolatry. Thousands of people would not hesitate for a moment to accuse a miser of this sin, but they would find it unfair to accuse the man described first. Only the light of God's Word can enable us to discover the terrible sin of greed that is within us. The pursuit of profit, the desire to possess more and more, the desire to achieve something: these are generally held in such high esteem by people that few

of them are able to see that they are an abomination in the sight of God.

The human heart loves the things it finds in the world and worships them, yes, it adores them. Every heart has its own idol. One person's idol is money, another's is pleasure, yet another's is honour and power. Every unconverted individual is an idolater. And even believers are not immune to idolatrous influences, as evidenced by the warning of the apostle John: “*Children, keep yourselves from idols*” (1 John 5 v.21)! That is why this serious question applies to all of us who know the Lord Jesus: Have we truly turned away from idols? Have we truly broken with the world and our old life? Has the living Word of God led us to condemn our entire previous life as worthless before God? Or have we remained anchored to our old habits? Do the lusts and things of the past still have influence in our hearts? Can everyone around us hear and see that we are a new creation? Could the apostle say the same thing about us as he did about the Thessalonians: “*In every place your faith which is towards God has gone abroad, so that we have no need to say anything*” (1 Thessalonians 1 v.8)?

3- To turn to God

*“How ye **turned to God** from idols to serve a living and true God, and to await his Son from the heavens.”*

We now come to what we might call the positive side of true conversion. We have seen that conversion consists in turning away **from idols**, turning away from all the things that dominated us and to which our love was directed. It consists in turning away from all ephemeral things, from all the follies, passions and pleasures that constituted our life in the days of our blindness and darkness. It is a conversion that consists in turning away from darkness and the power of Satan (1*), from the present evil world (2*). True conversion, however, goes further. This is only the negative but very real and necessary side of conversion.

(1*) *“... that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive remission of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me [me = Jesus]” (Acts 26 v.18).*

(2*) *“... our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, so that he should deliver us out of the present evil world, according to the will of our God and Father ...” (Galatians 1:3 & 4).*

It is undoubtedly a wonderful blessing to be delivered forever from the depravity and moral perversity of our former life and

from the terrible bondage of the prince of this world. It is a great thing to be removed from a world that lies in wickedness and to be delivered from the passions and pleasures of sin. But we repeat: true conversion is much more than that. If we have broken with the world and with our own “self” [= our “I”], if we have renounced our former pleasures and our little joys of the past, if we have — to put it in a word — said goodbye to everything that made up our life in this world, what do we receive in return? Our verses, in just one word, give a clear and complete answer to this question: “*How you turned to God from idols*”.

What a precious answer! Yes, it is unspeakably precious to all who understand even a little of its meaning and significance. What have I received in place of the idols of old? **God!** In place of the fleeting pleasures of this world, produced by sin? **God!** In place of its riches, honours and medals? **God!** What did the lost son [Luke 15] receive in place of the rags of the far country? The finest garment in his father's house. In place of the food that the pigs ate? His father's fatted calf. In place of the degrading service of a beggar? His father's kisses, heart and feast.

Is this not a magnificent exchange? Do we not have, in this beautiful and well-known story of the lost son, a touching and accurate image of true conversion? What a change, what a complete reversal we discover there! No one can describe the feelings that overwhelmed the son when he returned and his father embraced him tenderly, revealing all his love and kindness. The rags, the pig feed, the slavery, the famine, the hunger, the distress: everything, absolutely everything had come to an end, a definitive end! Instead, he felt the indescribable joy of being in his father's house, yes, of being at home there. Moreover, he realised with happiness that all the cries of joy and celebration that surrounded him were because of his return, and yes! And that made his father happy to have him back with him.

Some may object that this is only an image. That is true, but what does this image represent? It represents a wonderful reality. It is an image of what happens during a true conversion. Conversion is not simply abandoning the world with all its fleeting things and follies. That is part of it, of course, but it is much more than that. It establishes ***a link with God***, a connection with the Father's house, the eternal "at home". At the very moment of conversion, that person is brought into this relationship with God, by virtue of the work of redemption (*) accom-

plished by Christ. From then on, he/she is a Christian, a child of God and an heir to the kingdom, even though they may know little or nothing about it.

(*) *Redemption is the act of being bought back from Satan's slavery.*

This is a true conversion. It would be good for us to understand this clearly. We should not be satisfied with anything less than this magnificent reality, this conversion, turning from darkness to light, from the power of Satan and idols to God. Already now, the Christian is so close to God, to whom he has been brought, that he is already in heaven. Some may find this extreme, but it is a blessed truth. The apostle Peter says: *“For Christ indeed has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us”* to heaven when we die? Oh no! But: *“he might bring us to God”* already now, at this very moment (1 Peter 3 v.18).

Similarly, we read in the Epistle to the Romans: *“For if, being enemies, we have been reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much rather, having been reconciled, we shall be saved in the power of his life. And not only that, but we are making our boast in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom now we have received the reconciliation”* (Chapter 5 v. 10 & 11). Our adorable Saviour brings all those who believe in Him into God's presence. What He Himself pos-

sesses with God, being pleasing to Him and doing His will, He gives to us. He brings us into the position that He Himself has before God. He unites us to Himself and makes us partakers of all that He has and is, except of course His Divinity. We are one with Him.

Many passages in the Scriptures bear witness to this: “*Yet a little and the world sees me no longer; but ye see me; because I live ye also shall live*” (John 14 v.19). And “*I leave peace with you; I give my peace to you: not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it fear*” (John 14 v.27). “*I have spoken these things to you that my joy may be in you, and your joy be full*” (John 15 v.11). “*I call you no longer bondmen [= servant], for the bondman does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things which I have heard of my Father I have made known to you*” (John 15 v.15). Thus we read in the Lord Jesus's prayer worthy to worship in John 17: “*For the words which thou hast given me I have given them, and they have received them, and have known truly that I came out from thee, and have believed that thou sentest me. I demand concerning them; I do not demand concerning the world, but concerning those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine, (and all that is mine is thine, and all that is thine mine,) and I am glorified in them ... I have given them*

thy word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, as I am not of the world ... As thou hast sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world ... And the glory which thou hast given me I have given them, that they may be one, as we are one; I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and that thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me. Father, as to those whom thou hast given me, I desire that where I am they also may be with me, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, -- and the world has not known thee, but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have made known to them thy name, and will make [it] known; that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them” (John 17:8-10, 14, 18 & 22-26).

One cannot imagine anything higher or more blessed. To be completely united with the glorified man Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to share in the love with which He is loved by the Father, to share in His peace, His joy and His glory: this is the highest character and the highest degree of blessings with which a creature can be blessed. To be saved from the horror of eternal judgement, purified, washed, justified, and in this way

alone made fit for heaven: this would already be an amazing grace and immeasurable goodness and love. But to be brought to God, being perfectly pleasing as His beloved Son is, to be intimately united with Him, in His position and glory before God: truly, this is something that only God's heart can conceive and only His power can accomplish!

The conversion we are talking about therefore involves all of this. So glorious is God's grace, so great is the love with which He loved us, while we were still dead in our faults and sins, while we were still enemies of God and in the service of our lusts and passions, while we were idolaters and blindly enslaved to Satan, and while we were walking on the broad path that leads to perdition.

But what is most precious among all this is that it truly glorifies God and that His heart rejoices in bringing us into this place of inexpressible blessing, love, and glory. His love would not have been satisfied by giving us a place less than that of His own Son. With this wonderful richness of grace in view, the apostle exclaimed: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ; according as he has chosen us in him before the world`s foundation, that we should be holy and*

blameless before him in love; having marked us out beforehand for adoption through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has taken us into favour in the Beloved: in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1 v.3-7).

What unfathomable love we find here, what abundance of blessings! It is God's purpose to glorify us with Himself for all eternity. He wants to show us, before the eyes of the whole universe, the overflowing riches of His goodness in Christ Jesus. Our forgiveness and justification, our perfect deliverance, the fact of being made acceptable to God, all the blessings offered to us in Christ Jesus: in this, the glory of God will be made visible in eternity. As we have already said, it would not be enough for God's glory and would not satisfy the affection of His heart if we occupied any place other than that of His beloved Son.

All this is so wonderful that it seems unbelievable. But it is entirely worthy of God, and it is His pleasure to act in this way. That is enough for us. It was certainly too great and too wonderful, yes, impossible if we had to acquire it ourselves. But it

is not too great for God to grant it to us. His own love and the dignity of Christ are His own measure. The lost son could have asked to become a hired servant, as he intended to do (*), but that was completely impossible. Could the father's heart have borne to see his son working as a hired servant in his house? He had to be there **as a son**, or not at all. If it were only a matter of our merit, we would have as little right to the place of a hired servant as to that of a son. But - praise God! - He does not act according to *our* merits, but according to the overflowing love of His heart and to the praise of the glory of His name.

(*) *“I will rise up and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee; I am no longer worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants”*
(Luke 15 v.18-19).

This, then, is true conversion. We have been **brought to God** — and nothing less. We have not merely been converted, having been turned away from our idols, whatever they may be, but we have been brought into God's presence to find our joy in Him, to glory in Him, to walk with Him, to have all our sources in Him, to quench our thirst at the inexhaustible fountain of His love, and to find in Him the perfect answer to all our needs and difficulties, so that our souls may be fully satisfied forever.

Would we then return to idols? Never! Do we feel nostalgia for the things that occupied us so much? If we truly know our position and our possessions in Christ, certainly not. Would the lost son have wanted to return to the pigs and desire their food, when he was in his father's arms, dressed in the finest robe and seated at his father's table? It is impossible to believe. We cannot imagine that he would ever again have a desire to go to that distant country when he was in that wonderful and blessed house of love.

Unfortunately, there are people who claim to be converted, who walk on the right path for a while, but who begin to grow increasingly cold, weary and discontented. The work in their hearts was not a genuine work. They were not truly brought to God. They may have abandoned their idols for a time, but they did not go to God Himself. They never found anything in Him that truly satisfied their hearts. They never recognised the true meaning of communion with Him, they never tasted the contentment of the heart, nor its peace in Christ. After a while, their unsatisfied hearts began to desire the world again. They turned back and sank deeper into their follies.

Such cases are truly sad and discouraging. They bring great disgrace upon Christ and are often an obstacle for people who

doubt with fear. But this does not change the truth. It has no bearing on the question of true conversion according to God's thoughts.

The more we consider 1 Thessalonians 1 v.9, the more we admire its depth, richness and power. What a wealth of material for meditation is contained in the words: “*turned to God from idols*”! Do we understand its full meaning and power? It is a wonderful thing to be brought to God, to know Him as our refuge in all our cares and needs, as the Source of our joy, as our Strength and Shield, as our Guide and Comforter, as our All in all.

Do you know the value of these things? If you are a child of God, a truly converted person, it is your happy privilege to know them. Never settle for anything less! Nothing can make the heart content and happy except God alone. The whole world is not able to satisfy the needs of the heart and appease its desires. If we possessed all the riches and treasures of the world, if all pleasures were at our disposal, the heart would still yearn for more. There would always remain a sad emptiness that cannot be filled by anything on earth.

Let us take Solomon's story to heart. He shares his own experiences:

“I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I applied my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under the heavens: this grievous occupation hath God given to the children of men to weary themselves therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and pursuit of the wind. That which is crooked cannot be made straight; and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I have become great and have acquired wisdom more than all they that have been before me over Jerusalem; and my heart hath seen much of wisdom and knowledge. And I applied my heart to the knowledge of wisdom, and to the knowledge of madness and folly: I perceived that this also is a striving after the wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

I said in my heart, Come now, I will try thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure. But behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, Madness! and of mirth, What availeth it? I searched in my heart how to cherish my flesh with wine, while practising my heart with wisdom; and how to lay hold on folly, till I

should see what was that good for the children of men which they should do under the heavens all the days of their life.

I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and parks, and I planted trees in them of every kind of fruit; I made me ponds of water, to water therewith the wood, where the trees are reared. I acquired servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of herds and flocks, above all that had been in Jerusalem before me. I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces; I got me men-singers and women-singers, and the delights of the children of men, a wife and concubines. And I became great, and increased more than all that had been before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them: I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour, and this was my portion from all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that it had cost me to do [them]; and behold, all was vanity and pursuit of the wind, and there was no profit under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1 v.12 until 2 v.11).

This is an assessment of all the resources of the earth, from the mouth of a man who possessed everything the earth had to offer. What is his conclusion? *“All is vanity and pursuit of the wind”*. Yes, *“All things are full of toil; none can express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing”* (chapter 1 v.8). The poor heart of man can never be truly satisfied by what the earth can give him. Earthly water cannot quench the thirst of the immortal soul. Even if the things of the earth were imperishable and not temporary, they could never make us truly happy.

Everyone will one day experience the truth of this statement: *“All is vanity and pursuit of the wind”*. Someone may close his/her ears to this now. He may refuse to listen to the voice of the Spirit warning him/her. They may imagine that the world can bring him/her true comfort and happiness. He/she may pursue riches, honours, prestige, and pleasures as diligently as he/she can, but he/she will find that nothing can truly satisfy them, that everything is vanity and a passing wind. But how terrible it would be if, **too late**, he/she made this discovery, like the rich man in Luke 16 (*), opening his eyes in the midst of torment, in the pains of eternal fire.

(*) *“Now there was a rich man and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, making good cheer in splendour every day. And there was a*

poor man, by name Lazarus, who was laid at his gateway full of sores, and desiring to be filled with the crumbs which fell from the table of the rich man; but the dogs also coming licked his sores. And it came to pass that the poor man died, and that he was carried away by the angels into the bosom of Abraham. And the rich man also died and was buried. And in hades lifting up his eyes, being in torments, he sees Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he crying out said, Father Abraham, have compassion on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering in this flame. But Abraham said, Child, recollect that thou hast fully received thy good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things. But now he is comforted here, and thou art in suffering. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm is fixed, so that those who desire to pass hence to you cannot, nor do they who desire to cross from there pass over unto us. And he said, I beseech thee then, father, that thou wouldest send him to the house of my father, for I have five brothers, so that he may earnestly testify to them, that they also may not come to this place of torment. But Abraham says to him, They have Moses and the prophets: let them hear them. But he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if one from the dead should go to them, they will repent” (Luke 16 v.19-30).

Who can describe the terrible fate of the person eternally banished from God's presence, in outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth? The mere thought of it is appalling. What will the reality be? What will it be like to survive the tortures of hell, on the wrong side of the unbridgeable chasm, where not even the faintest glimmer of hope will penetrate the thick and terrible darkness of eternity?

But let us come back to our subject. How extremely important it is to find all our resources in the living God! Let us strive to deepen our knowledge of God, of this God to whom, by grace, we have turned. In our dealings with people of the world, it is extremely important to show that we have found perfect rest in God. It is of great value when, by grace, we are able to tell the world that we are not dependent on it. But this is only possible if we are constantly aware of what we have in God. This gives moral elevation to our entire behaviour. It frees us from the tendency to rely on men and to seek refuge in human resources. On this point, we should all be ashamed. How much we tend to seek help from our fellow human beings, to seek advice and comfort from them, instead of waiting on God in the first place! This is a serious fault on our part. In essence, we forget the Source of living waters and dig cisterns that cannot hold water (*). What is the result? Drought and barrenness. Our God, in His great faithfulness, allows our fellow human beings to abandon us, so that we may learn how foolish it is to trust in men.

(*) *“For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, to hew them out cisterns, broken cisterns that hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13).*

What does the prophet say about this important subject? *“Thus saith Jehovah: Cursed is the man that confideth in man, and*

maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from Jehovah. And he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but he shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed ...” - let us pay close attention to the contrast that follows - *“Blessed is the man that confideth in Jehovah, and whose confidence Jehovah is. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out its roots by the stream, and he shall not see when heat cometh, but his leaf shall be green; and in the year of drought he shall not be careful, neither shall he cease to yield fruit”* (Jeremiah 17 v.5-8).

It is extremely valuable to lean on the arm of the living God, to find refuge and help in Him at all times, in all places and in all circumstances. He never disappoints those who trust in Him. He never abandons anyone. Perhaps He sees fit to make us wait a little for the answer to our prayer. But the time we spend waiting is in itself a blessing. And when the answer comes, we are filled with praise and gratitude. We are then able to say: *“Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee, before the sons of men!”* (Psalm 31 v.19).

There is something glorious about trusting God, knowing that He can meet all our needs. This must truly be a reality in our lives, not just fine words. It makes no sense to talk about trusting God while at the same time looking to anyone around us for help from a mortal being. In this, are we not often deceiving ourselves? We speak the language of trust in God, but at the same time we look to a human being to share our needs with. We then dishonour God. This always ends in disappointment and shame.

Let us examine this with the utmost seriousness and complete honesty! It is important to understand the full meaning of these precious words: “*turned to God*”. If someone has truly turned to God (*), he/she have discovered the divine secret of peace, rest and complete satisfaction of their desires. He/she find his/her everything in God.

(*) i.e. “converted” a “U-turn to God”

What if I find myself in some kind of difficulty? I can turn to God for guidance. He has promised to be my Guide — and what a perfect Guide He is! He already sees the end of a thing before its beginning. He knows my circumstances as well as I do. He is an infallible Guide. His wisdom cannot fail. And besides, He loves me with an inexpressible love. Where could I find a better guide?

Am I in distress? Then I can turn to my God. He is the Owner of heaven and earth. The treasures of the universe are at His disposal. He will help me if He sees fit. And if He does not, the misery I am in is better for me than being delivered from it. *“My God shall abundantly supply all your need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4 v.19). Is that not enough? Then why should I turn to human resources? God has committed Himself to provide for all my needs, however great and numerous they may be. *“He who, yea, has not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him grant us all things?”* (Romans 8 v.32).

Without a doubt, God often uses His creatures as instruments to help us in difficult times. But this is something else entirely. The apostle Paul could say: *“God, encouraged us by the coming of Titus”* (2 Corinthians 7 v.6). Paul was waiting for God's comfort — and God sent Titus to comfort him. If Paul had been waiting for this from Titus, he would certainly have been disappointed. It is always so. In all our difficulties and needs, our eyes should be fixed solely on God. We have turned away from idols to **turn to God**; it is He who must be our only refuge in all circumstances. We can turn to Him for advice, help, guidance, compassion — in short, for everything we need. *“O my soul, rest peacefully; for my expectation is from him. He only is my*

rock and my salvation; my high fortress: I shall not be moved”
(Psalm 62 v.5-6).

Perhaps someone is wondering whether the habit of looking only to God leads us to underappreciate the channels through which His grace flows. Quite the contrary. How could I despise someone who has been sent to me by God as an instrument to meet my needs? That's not possible, is it? I appreciate them as a **channel**, but I don't address them as a **resource**. That's what makes all the difference.

We must never forget what true conversion is: **we are brought to God**. And when that happens, we find in Him a perfect object for our hearts and a perfect resource in all our circumstances.

4- To turn ... to serve

*“How ye **turned** to God from idols **to serve** a living and true God, and to await his Son from the heavens.”*

What follows is of great importance to every believer: “*How ye turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God*”. Our obligation is to “serve”. Our entire lives, from the moment of our conversion to the end of our earthly journey, should be marked by a spirit of true and devoted service. This is our great privilege, and indeed, our sacred duty. It does not matter how large or small our sphere of influence is, nor what profession we pursue. If we are converted, we have only one thing to do: **to serve God**. If, among our activities, there are things that are contrary to the revealed will of God, we must abandon them at any cost. The first step of an obedient servant is to leave unsuitable places and turn away from evil.

We are called to serve God. Everything must be measured against this standard. Christians have only one question to ask themselves: “Can I fulfil the obligations of my role to the glory of God?” If not, they must give up that role. If we cannot associate God's name with our work, we must abandon it if we want to walk with God and desire to live in Him and be pleas-

ing to Him. We can then pray to Him to open a path for us in which we can walk to His glory.

He will answer this prayer, may His name be praised! He will never let those who trust in Him be put to shame. All we have to do is attach ourselves to Him with a resolution of the heart; then He will show us the way. This path may seem narrow, rough and lonely to us. However, our simple task is to stand before God and not remain in relationship for one more hour with anything that is contrary to the teaching of His Word.

A sensitive conscience, a simple outlook and a submissive heart will find clear answers to many questions, resolve many difficulties and remove many obstacles. The action of divine nature alone will protect us from many circumstances that would cause us embarrassment, if only we give this nature the opportunity to act within us. *“The lamp of the body is thine eye: when thine eye is simple, thy whole body also is light”* (Luke 11 v.34). When our hearts beat for Christ and His interests, for His name and for the service of God, the Holy Spirit opens up the precious treasures of God's Word to us and a flood of living light flows over our spiritual understanding. This is how we see the path we must walk, as clearly as the sun, and only then can we walk it with determination.

We must never forget that we have been converted to serve God. In our unconverted state, we worshipped idols and served our desires and lusts. Now we worship God. We are called to serve Him with all our strength. We have turned to God to find in Him our complete rest and satisfaction. In Christ, He offers us everything that can satisfy the desires of the new life within us: *“In order ... that the Christ may dwell, through faith, in your hearts, being rooted and founded in love, in order that ye may be fully able to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge; that ye may be filled even to all the fulness of God”* (Ephesians 3 v.16-19).

Thus fulfilled, satisfied and strengthened, we are called to devote ourselves with mind, soul and body to the service of Christ, to be firm, immovable, abounding always in the work of the Lord (*). Anything that cannot be done to serve Christ should not be done. This makes everything particularly simple. We have the precious privilege of doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus and for the glory of God. We sometimes speak of a secular calling and a calling that is a holy service to God. But is it right to make such a distinction? Paul made tents and sowed the Word, but he served the Lord Jesus in both circumstances. Everything a Christian does must be holy, because

it is done as a service to God. If we thought about this constantly, it would help us to establish a link between the Lord Himself and the simplest obligations of our daily lives. Instead of considering the duties of our profession as an obstacle to our communion with God, we can perform them to give Him glory.

(*) *“Be firm, immovable, abounding always in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 15 v.58).

Serving God is actually much simpler than we often think. It does not consist of us doing great things that go beyond the limits of the field God has assigned us. Let us take the example of a person doing a domestic work. How can she serve the living and true God? She cannot go on a trip and visit people to preach the gospel to them. Her field of action is her employer's house. If she started going door to door to bring people to the gospel, she would be neglecting the work God has assigned her. What does the apostle say? He urges that: *“bondmen to be subject to their own masters, to make themselves acceptable in everything; not gainsaying; not robbing their masters, but shewing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the teaching which is of our Saviour God in all things”* (Titus 2 v.9-10). A slave, through his obedience, submission and honesty, can highlight God's teaching just as much as an evangelist who, like a servant, accomplishes the work that Christ has assigned

to him. *“Bondmen, obey masters according to flesh, with fear and trembling, in simplicity of your heart as to the Christ; not with eye-service as men-pleasers; but as bondmen of Christ, doing the will of God from the soul, serving with good will as to the Lord, and not to men; knowing that whatever good each shall do, this he shall receive of the Lord, whether bond or free”* (Ephesians 6:5-8).

How beautiful is that! This opens up an extremely vast field for our service to God. But where can we still find this simplicity of heart? Where can we find the fear and trembling that prevents us from responding to God's thoughts? Where can we find such devoted service?

Is it not a special proof of God's grace for every true Christian to be able to serve and honour Him, even in the ordinary things of work and household chores? If it were otherwise, what would 99 out of 100 Christians have to do? Is it not an inexpressible blessing to know that our God deigns, in His grace, to associate His Name and His glory with the fulfilment of duties that are of so little value in the eyes of men? This gives great importance to what we do from early morning until late at night. *“Whatsoever ye do, labour at it heartily, as doing it to the Lord, and not to men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall re-*

ceive the recompense of the inheritance; ye serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3 v.23-24). That is the secret of the whole matter.

The realisation of what we have just considered would morally elevate the whole of Christian life. It would provide a triumphant response to all the mockery and chicanery of unbelief. It would have more force than ten thousand of the most learned objections. No proof is as powerful and decisive as the serious, devoted, holy and consecrated life of a Christian; and such a life can be revealed in all its power by someone whose sphere of activity is limited to the four walls of a kitchen.

Moreover, such a life is a complete protection against any attempt to subject Christians to the law. The unregenerate man can do no work except dead works and evil works. All his thoughts, words, and deeds deserve eternal punishment and unquenchable fire. *“They that are in flesh cannot please God”* (Romans 8 v.8). What is the point of exhorting unconverted people to do good works? It can only lead them astray.

And what should the converted person do? He/she obviously does not need to do works to receive life, because he/she already possesses eternal life as a free gift from God. He/she does not need to do works to be saved, because he/she is

already eternally saved. What, then, is he called to do? “**To serve a living and true God**”. In what, when and where? In everything, always and everywhere. The convert has nothing else to do but serving God. If he/she does anything else, he/she is unfaithful to his/her Saviour and Master.

Yes, Christians are called to serve. Let us never forget that! They have the privilege of presenting their bodies “*a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your intelligent service*” (Romans 12 v.1). This dispels all difficulties, nullifies all objections and puts everything in its proper place. It is not about what I do, but how I do it. It is not about where I am, but how I behave. Christianity as it unfolds in the New Testament is the expression of Christ's life in the believer; it is Christ represented by the power of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's daily life. Everything associated with the Christian, everything he says and does, must bear the distinctive marks of God's service.

5- To turn ... to await

“How ye turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to await his Son from the heavens.”

We must now consider the last words of the two verses in 1 Thessalonians 1. They provide convincing proof that Paul's preaching in Thessalonica was complete, as well as the depth of the work among the new converts in that place. They had not only turned from idols to God, nor only to serve the living and true God, but “*to await his Son from the heavens*”.

The joyful expectation of Christ's coming was an important part of the gospel preached by Paul and of the Christianity of those who were brought to conversion by this message. This servant of God preached a complete gospel. He proclaimed not only that the Son of God had come into the world to accomplish the great work of reconciliation and lay the foundation on which God's wonderful counsels could be realised, but also that He had returned to heaven and, as a victorious and glorified man, had taken His place at the right hand of God's throne. But also that He is coming again, first to take His own to Himself and bring them to His Father's house where He has prepared a

place for them, and then to appear with them, exercise judgment on His enemies, and establish His glorious reign.

It was not a dry and arid doctrine that had to be accepted, part of a kind of profession of faith. That would have been powerless and worthless. No, it was a living reality, a moral force in the heart, a precious hope that purifies, detaches hearts from earthly things, and leads us to continually await the return of our beloved Saviour and Master, Jesus Christ. The fact that the two letters to the Thessalonians speak more about the coming of the Lord Jesus than any other is of great importance. This is all the more remarkable because they are the first letters written by Paul, and because they were addressed to a congregation that was still very young in the faith.

The hope of the coming of the Lord Jesus is mentioned in all eight (5+3) chapters and related to all sorts of things. In the first chapter, this coming is presented as the great subject that should always occupy the attention of every Christian, regardless of his position and relationships in the world. He is the light that shines at the end of a long journey through a dark and painful desert. *“How ye turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to await his Son from the heavens”*.

What were they waiting for? The hour of their death? To fall asleep and leave this world? Oh no, the apostle is far from thinking that. Death is abolished for believers and is never presented as something to look forward to. So what was it then? They were waiting for “*his Son from the heavens, whom he raised from among the dead*”

The apostle adds these wonderful words: “*Jesus, our deliverer from the coming wrath*”! This is the One we are waiting for: our beloved Saviour, our great Deliverer, He who took it upon Himself to deliver us from our desperate condition, who removed every cloud between God and us. We can now look up to heaven and see the brightness and grandeur of His glory and love, which will be ours for eternity.

What a blessing it is to always look forward — morning, noon, evening, and night — to the coming of our Redeemer! It detaches our hearts from all that is visible and lifts them above the fleeting things of this world, if, each day, we begin our work with the precious thought that before night falls, we may be caught up in the air to meet our beloved Saviour.

Is this just the dream of a fanatic or a visionary? Not at all, it is a solid truth, based on the same foundation that makes us Christians. Is it true that the Son of God in the person of Jesus

of Nazareth was born on earth? Is it true that He lived and worked here, amid the misery of a poor humanity? Is it true that He sighed and was moved when He saw the ravages caused by sin? Is it true that He went to the cross and offered Himself without blemish to God to meet the demands of the throne of God, the righteous Judge, to triumph over the devil, to take away sin and bear the sins of all who would bow down before God, from the beginning of time to the end? Is it true that He remained three days and three nights in the tomb and that, as Head of the new creation, on the first day of the week, triumphant, He rose from the dead and then ascended into heaven, after more than five hundred witnesses saw Him? Is it true that fifty days after His resurrection, He poured out the Holy Spirit upon believers and has dwelt in them ever since? Is it true that since the day of Pentecost, He has been active for us as Advocate with the Father and as High Priest before God?

Yes, thank God, all these things are perfectly true. They are communicated to us in the New Testament with admirable clarity, power and completeness. They rest on the solid foundation of the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God, a foundation that no hostile power can ever undermine. And it is on this same unshakeable foundation that the blessed hope of the return of the Lord Jesus rests. Just as surely as our Lord Jesus Christ was

laid as a child in the manger in Bethlehem, grew to adulthood, travelled the land doing good, was nailed to the cross and laid in the tomb, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in heaven, so it is true that He will return to take His own to Himself. He may come even today. No one knows when He will come, but it is possible at any moment. The only thing that still holds Him back is His patience, His love and His mercy. He has been waiting for almost two thousand years - and He is still waiting because of His long-suffering mercy and patience.

The Lord Jesus will return. We should always live in expectation of this. No power can prevent the Lord Jesus from gathering us to Himself. What a moment that will be! Above all, what will it be like to see Him, our Saviour Jesus, to admire His benevolent face and hear His message of welcome!

It is a precious hope that warms and comforts our hearts. Is it any wonder that this expectation occupied such an important place in the apostle's thinking and teaching? He returns to it again and again. When it comes to their spiritual growth and the progress of their effective piety, he says to the Thessalonians: *“But you, may the Lord make to exceed and abound in love toward one another, and toward all, even as we also to-*

wards you, in order to the confirming of your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” (1 Thessalonians 3 v.12-13). Let us pay particular attention to the conclusion of these moving and magnificent words: “*With all his saints*”. None of those who are saved will be missing, whatever their uncertainties and mistakes, their faults and failings. Our blessed Redeemer will exclude none of his beloved ones.

Does this unfathomable grace make us careless and indifferent? God forbid! No, the sense of grace keeps alive our awareness of our holy responsibility, so that we condemn and reject everything in ourselves and in our lives that is contrary to the mind of Christ and his way of seeing things. And not only that. The expectation of the return of the Lord Jesus sanctifies, purifies and entirely elevates our character and our lives. Nothing else can do this. A person who belongs to the Lord Jesus cannot truly live in the hope of seeing his Master at any moment and at the same time be wholeheartedly attached to earthly things. If we wait daily for the Son of God from heaven, the things of this life will lose their value in our eyes. Waiting for the Lord Jesus is not a matter of the intellect, but of the heart. It is possible that our minds fully understand the doctrine of the coming of the Lord Jesus and that the course of events according to

prophetic truth is perfectly clear to us, yet this may have no effect whatsoever on our hearts, our character, and our practical lives. Our entire moral life and practical walk should truly be shaped by the happy and blessed hope of seeing the One who loves us and who has washed us from our sins by His precious blood.

May our Father look upon us in grace and heal, restore, and refresh our souls! He wants to bring forth in the hearts of all His beloved children the true hope of the Christian. He wants to awaken them to wait for their Saviour and Lord Jesus, to long to see the Morning Star rise. May it be so, that our whole heart and our whole life express our true desire: “*Amen; come, Lord Jesus*” (Revelation 22 v.20).