

CHAPTER SIX

THE IMMINENCY OF THE COMING OF CHRIST FOR THE CHURCH

In the most plain and concise language, the New Testament Scriptures set forth the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as the hope, encouragement, and comfort of God's pilgrim people. It is for His appearing that they are instructed to watch and to wait. It is by the expectation of His soon return that they are encouraged to live in all purity. It is with the knowledge that reunion will be made with departed ones at the return of Christ that they are exhorted to comfort one another. The fact that Christ will come again and that His coming may be very soon has long been the prime hope of the people of God.

It is likewise clear from Scripture that no man can know the day, nor the hour, of Christ's return. To many Christians, as they study the Word, it is equally clear that no prophesied, or clearly scheduled, event stands between the present hour and the catching away of the Church at the rapture. They do not look for the earthly kingdom of Christ, nor for the revelation of the Antichrist and the awful years of the Tribulation. They look for Christ Himself, believing that His coming is the next major event upon the calendar of heaven.

In so believing, many Christians affirm that the coming of Christ is imminent, which does not mean that this glad event must be immediate, but rather that it is overhanging, that it may occur at any moment. The word imminent, if used of an evil event, might be rendered impending, for it is always threatening to come to pass. An imminent event is one that hangs suspended, possibly for an indefinite period of time, but the final occurrence is certain. As applied to the coming of the Lord, imminency consists of three things: the certainty that He may come at any moment, the uncertainty of the time of that arrival, and the fact that no prophesied event stands between the believer and that hour.

The purpose of such imminency is that the Church may be in a constant state of expectancy, always looking for and waiting for the coming of her Lord from heaven. Not only is the hope of His return a source of comfort and encouragement to the believer, but also it is a very definite incentive for service and for holy living. By the very nature of the case, if the exact time of the rapture had been revealed, none but the final generation of Christians would have cause to look for the return of their Saviour, and for every other generation this vital hope and incentive would then have been lost. Such is the mischief caused when any known event, such as the Tribulation, the coming of Antichrist, or the Millennium, is thrust between the Church and the coming of Christ for His own. Arthur T. Pierson writes:

The imminence of the second advent is destroyed the moment that we locate between the first and second coming of our Lord any such definite period of time, whether it be one hundred years or a thousand; for how can one look for an event as imminent which he knows is not to take place for a definite time to come?[1]

The placing of even a seven year period such as the Tribulation, with its impressive personages and clearly scheduled events, between the present hour and the rapture just as certainly destroys the Biblical concept of an imminent return. Yet this is the position of posttribulation brethren, who vehemently defend the hypothesis that the Church must pass through the entire Tribulation period. Indeed, the denial of imminency as applied to the coming of Christ is one of their main contentions, as illustrated by Robert Cameron, who fills approximately one third of his book with this very argument.[2]

Since the return of Christ for His Church is a very precious hope to Christians everywhere, since there is involved no small amount of comfort, encouragement, and incentive to right living, and since

much of this advantage is lost by any denial of the imminency of that coming, it is important to give the subject a thorough re-examination. Little has been written in its defence, but the charges hurled against it are many. The following pages will demonstrate, it is believed, that the charges are false and that the doctrine stands firm. First to be considered are the various arguments against imminency, after which the large Scriptural support for the doctrine will be indicated.

1. THE CASE AGAINST IMMINENCY

Robert Cameron, because of his heavy emphasis upon this particular problem, may well be chosen as this spokesman for the case against imminency. Certainly, his approach is thorough, and it is also ambitious, for he writes “to show that such teaching is opposed to the whole of the New Testament.”^[3] In common with others who deny the imminent return of Christ, Cameron enumerates a number of basic objections:

The fact that Christ promised the coming of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, seems to indicate that a period of time must occur between Christ’s departure and His return, and an imminent return would make the coming of the Spirit “ a fool’s errand.”^[4] So also, the promise of Christ to Peter (John 21:18, 19) that he would live until old age would preclude the possibility of early Christians looking for Christ at any moment. Peter also wrote of “mockers,” who would say, in after years, “Where is the promise of his coming?” Likewise, the parables of Matt. 13 were intended to reveal truths, previously not made known, concerning the period between the rejection of Christ by Israel and His return. Claiming that these parables set forth the course of this entire age, Cameron implies that a long time must elapse before their completion.

Time, labour, many years of toil, growth and development, in the history of Christendom must precede the Advent.^[5]

This same thought he finds in the parable of the nobleman who went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, then returned. Before the return, his servants must have ample time to trade and to increase the number of their talents. Even more definite, according to Cameron, is the parable of the talents in Matt. 25:14-30, where it is distinctly said, “after a long time the Lord of these servants cometh and maketh a reckoning with them.”

Now, while no definite period is named, by no juggling of words can a “long time” be turned into a short time, much less into a moment. By virtue of the terms of this Parable, harmonizing with the teaching of all other Parables, the “imminent,” or “any moment” Advent of the Lord was an unthinkable possibility.^[6]

Cameron argues further that the Great Commission of Matt. 28:19, 20 implies a long interval of time, and that there is not the slightest reason for assuming that an “un-named Jewish company,” converted after the rapture but before the Millennium, could complete the accomplishment of this task. Still more definite, it is argued, Paul evidently did not expect the Lord to come during his lifetime, for he records in 2 Tim. 4:6-8, “the time of my departure has come.” Also, he wrote the church at Rome of his proposed journey to Jerusalem, then to Rome, and after that, to Spain (Rom. 15:22-25, 30, 31). “If he had any thought of Christ coming immediately, could he have written this?”^[7]

Another posttribulationist, Edmund Shackleton, sums up the further details of this argument as well as any, when he says:

Prophets too, speaking by the Spirit, had told him that bonds and afflictions awaited him. In bidding farewell to the elders at Miletus, he told them of evils that would arise after his departing from them;

and these things would take a little time to develop. Then when Paul had been cast into prison at Jerusalem, the Lord stood by him at night and told him that he must bear witness also at Rome (Acts 33:11). Again, when writing to the Philippians from prison, he speaks of his desire to depart, or the alternative, that he might be liberated and pay them another visit. In both his Epistles to Timothy, he foretells spiritual dangers of a time still in the future.[8]

It is further argued by Cameron that Christ prophesied concerning the fall of Jerusalem, Paul predicted perilous times in the last days, and numerous other predicted events are to be found in the New Testament, all of which are used to demonstrate that the return of Christ could not have been expected in that day. In other words, the second coming of Christ must follow well-defined events of unfulfilled prophecy and therefore can not be imminent.

2. THESE OBJECTIONS ANSWERED

Although this present treatment of Cameron's arguments can in no wise rival in length the fifty pages he fills with objections to imminency, it is believed that a brief analysis of the chief issues will suffice to reveal the general weakness of his presentation and open the way for Bible students who wish to pursue the subject in greater detail. The following divisions follow the order of the objections set forth in the preceding section.

A. The Promise of the Comforter

Surely the promise that the disciples would be "baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:5) was no indication of any appreciable time which had to elapse before the Spirit could come. Actually, Pentecost took place a mere ten days after the ascension of Christ. It must constantly be kept in mind throughout this discussion that imminent does not mean immediate, and the fact that there was a brief interval before Pentecost does not prove that it formed any barrier to the disciples' faith in the Lord's soon return. In fact, when Christ does return, it will be for His Church, and the Church was not instituted until the time of the descent of the Spirit. It is difficult to see how Pentecost, before which the Church, as such, did not exist, could have been any kind of obstacle to faith in the imminent return of Christ for the members of that Church.

B. The Promise to Peter

Lest it be said that the posttribulational argument against imminency carries no weight, and that the events predicted concerning Peter and Paul have little bearing on one's belief in the imminent return of Christ, the following citation from Oswald Smith, pastor of the People's Church of Toronto, is significant. Setting forth his reasons for forsaking the pretribulation view, he writes:

Then when I remembered that the death of Peter, his prediction of corruption and apostasy after his decease, the death of Paul and many other events had to occur before the Rapture, my "any moment" theory took wings and flew.[9]

It is the belief of this present investigator that such a "flight" from a confident hope in the imminent return of Christ was an unnecessary departure, and that the former position was more tenable than the latter. No doubt many a busy pastor, and many an earnest saint, have been so misled by some clever writer pursuing a proselyting campaign for posttribulationalism.

The argument concerning Peter is that, on the basis of John 21:18, 19, Peter knew he would grow old and die, and therefore, for him at least, the coming of Christ could not be imminent. However, it is not clear that Peter so understood the Lord on this point. Certainly he encouraged the believers of his day to look for the coming of the Lord. Also, he knew that he might die suddenly (2 Pet. 1:14), and

although it is not stated whether he expected death, Herod had just killed with the sword James, the brother of John, and had seized Peter with the same intention (Acts 12:1-3). At least, it is certain that the believers expected Peter's death, for when Rhoda bore the news of his release, they said unto her, "Thou art mad," and when they saw Peter, "they were astonished" (Acts 12:15, 16). It is most doubtful if Peter had assurance that his death must precede the coming of his Lord, and it is obvious that the people had no concept that his would be a long life. The actual passage in question, John 21:18, with the apostle's explanation in the following verse, was not written until twenty or more years after the death of Peter. In the same context, verses 20-23, there is found a clear indication that the believers of that day expected the return of Christ within the lifetime of John. In contemplating Christ's coming, Peter, at least, was not a factor in the thinking of the early church. As they looked for the Saviour, they did not run around asking, "I wonder if Peter is dead yet?" Peter could have died suddenly without most people knowing it. Even if the promise of Christ were known throughout the Church, and interpreted in the strictest sense that Peter's death must precede Christ's coming, there was no reason for the Church to reject her belief in the imminent return on that basis. Judging from their spirit of expectancy, it is evident that they did not. This whole objection strikes one as being foolish and unnecessary, and it is dealt with here only because it seems to occupy so much posttribulational thinking.

Concerning the statement of Peter that in the last days, men should scoff at the promise of Christ's coming (2 Pet. 3:3-5), and the kindred predictions by Paul of "perilous times" (2 Tim. 3:1-5) and departure from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1-3), these conditions had a near, as well as a far, fulfillment. Such predictions were never an obstacle in the minds of believers of apostolic days, again evident from the fact that Christ's return was expected by the Early Church. Thiessen aptly harmonized these verses when he commented:

The writers of these prophecies did not think of them as lying in the remote future, but spoke of them as already present, at least in their beginnings, in their own day. They intended their statements to be a warning to the very people to whom they wrote, and not simply to us who live in the twentieth century.[10]

C. The Problem of Christ's Parables

Cameron rightfully holds the position that the seven parables of Christ, set forth in Matt. 13, picture the course of this present age between the rejection of Christ by Israel and His return to reign. He then defends his posttribulational view on the basis that both tares and wheat grow together until the time of harvest, and that there is a long time of sowing before the whole world is reached. Moreover:

The other six parables harmonize with this one, and a long time must elapse before the world could be sown; before the tares and wheat (Christendom) could mature; before the leaven of evil could spread through the whole meal of truth and before the drag net could be filled and the separation made.[11]

Hence, the tares will first be disposed of and the rapture cannot precede the judgment; also since a long time is involved in the fulfillment of these parables, the rapture is not imminent.

Similarly, it is argued, the parable of the nobleman who gave his servants the ten pounds was a rebuke to those who "thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear," and the parable of the talents in Matt. 25 clearly records that it was only after "a long time" that the lord of those servants came and made his reckoning with them. On the basis of such passages of Scripture, the posttribulationalists build an argument against imminency which they unhesitatingly label "unanswerable."

Yet a fair and reasonable answer is not difficult to find. The question is not whether God foresaw the entirety of the Church age when He gave these Scriptures, for that fact is obvious. Nor does the

question inquire whether the entire age is pictured in sufficient clarity for twentieth century believers to visualize in these parables the long history of Christendom. We have the advantage of the backward look, the historical perspective, and must concede from our vantage point that these parables do describe something of the task of the Church and the progress of the age.

The issue rather is whether or not first century Christians saw and understood in these parables enough of God's future purposes to reject the imminency of Christ's coming. We believe they did not. Since the very basic issues of God's redemptive program, notably, that Christ must go to the cross and on the third day rise again (Matt. 16:21-23; 17:22, 23; 26:69-75; Luke 24:21, 25; John 20:25, etc.), it is difficult indeed to see how early Christians in general could have comprehended God's prophetic program to the point of rejecting the imminent return of Him for whose coming they had been instructed to watch. This is particularly true, clothed as the predictions were – in the language of parables. To the contrary, the whole apostolic Church and the Christians of the following two centuries^[12] were characterized by the fact that they did look for the soon return of Christ. While it is admitted that a general outline of the development of Christendom is to be found pictured in the parables of the kingdom, it must be recognized that there was also a simultaneous, local application of these same parables. "All the conditions described in the parables exist simultaneously in all periods of the Church's history, and yet there is a progressive fulfillment as well."^[13] It is most probable that the early Christians saw only the preliminary fulfillment of their own day and had no true concept of the full development of the age. Was not the gospel soon carried to the furthestmost parts of the then-known world? Did not apostasy immediately set in, with unbelievers scoffing at the promise of Christ's coming? Apostasy has been present throughout the age, although it will reach its peak after the Church and the restraint of the Spirit have been removed. It is safe to conclude then, that the parabolic teachings of Christ constituted no obstacle to the hope of the apostolic Church in His imminent return.

It is said that the seven churches of Revelation 1-3 picture the course of the age, and therefore early Christians could not have held to the doctrine under consideration. While it is true that these churches bear a marked resemblance to the various periods of church history, and while granting that this is a legitimate application, it must not be forgotten that John was writing to seven existing, although representative, congregations. All these various shades of Christian testimony, or of departure from, were present in John's day, throughout the early church. John saw no need for projecting the second coming into the far distance future, for he was himself one of the chief witnesses to the soon coming of Christ, the closing words penned in the book of Revelation being "Sure I come quickly [*ταχύ*, speedily, as quickly as possible]. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). Paul also rejoiced that the Thessalonians "turned to God from idols ... and to wait for his Son from heaven."

In direct contradiction to the idea that certain parables would have led the early church to reject the hope of an imminent return, there is indication that some had actually ceased to work on the grounds that Christ might come at any moment (1 Thess. 4:11; 2 Thess. 3:10-12), and that others were growing restless at the seeming delay and had to be exhorted to patience (James 5:7, 8). There can therefore be no doubt that the apostolic church viewed the coming of Christ as imminent. Christ had comforted His disciples with the fact that He would come again, and there is much throughout the entire New Testament to encourage in the believer a spirit of daily expectation. Simultaneously, the too common error of fixing dates for the time of His return is carefully guarded against.

Now to deal more directly with the parables under discussion. The parable of the wheat and the tares indicates the nature of the present age, declaring that the godly and the wicked will live side by side until the return of Christ. But this can hardly mean that no believers or unbelievers at all will leave the earth before God's final harvest, for representatives of both groups are being removed by death almost every moment of the day. The parable merely presents the fact that both wheat and tares will continue on earth,

until the end, at which time separation will be made. Thus is explained the problem of why God permits the wicked to flourish with the righteous. He is aware of their seeming prosperity, but the time of separation has not yet come.

The parable, then, in no wise excludes the possibility of rapture before judgment, in which case the “wheat” of that final day will consist of those saved after the rapture, even the Jewish remnant and the many converts from among Gentile nations. And if, as posttribulationists insist, this parable sets the order of the harvest, even their system is not immune to difficulty, for the parable declares, “First, the tares.”

While Cameron urges that this passage proves “time, labour, many years of toil, growth and development, in the history of Christendom must precede the Advent,”^[14] who can deny that tares were flourishing in the midst of the wheat, even in the early church? Paul warned the elders of the spiritual Ephesian assembly that after his departing, “grievous wolves” should enter in among them and tear the flock (Acts 20:29). It would have been difficult indeed to persuade these elders that Christ could not come at any moment, on the grounds that the tares had not yet a sufficient time to flourish in the midst of the wheat! Although apostasy will reach its climax in the end time, it has marked the professing Church in every century of her existence. The Early Church was not so immune that lack of apostasy would have kept them from anticipating the coming of Christ.

The purpose of the parable of the nobleman is clearly explained in Luke 19:11. Christ’s followers were looking for the earthly kingdom of Messiah, and “because he was nigh to Jerusalem ... they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.” As yet, they did not comprehend that Christ would leave them, or that He must die, or that the setting up of the visible kingdom must await a second advent. Christ gave this parable to correct their thinking and to instruct them to “carry on business” for Him after His departure. He did not say how long He would be gone, but He did promise to return in such a manner that service should be rendered in the spirit of expectancy. We must “occupy” till He comes, even as in the Lord’s Supper, we “do shew the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Cor. 11:26). These expressions emphasize the imminency of the return of Christ, rather than denying it.

This is also true of the parable of the talents. An adult who has already achieved possession of a home, money, and servants, takes a journey, having first committed his goods into the hands of his servants. The length of his journey is not revealed, but the “long time” was not so many months or years that the owner did not find them all living upon his return, so that they might be held responsible. The parable was given to illustrate the need for watchfulness and not to establish the extent of the absence. If any impression was made at all concerning the time of the return, it must have been that the arrival would be within the lifetime of the servants. There is absolutely nothing to indicate, as Cameron pleads, that this parable makes the imminent return of the Lord “an unthinkable possibility.”^[15]

D. The Great Commission

Matt. 28:18-20 records the last command of Christ to His followers prior to His ascension. The passage is generally referred to as the “Great Commission,” or the “marching orders of the church.” Here is set forth the parting instruction of our Lord to carry the gospel to every creature and to teach all nations those things which He has commanded (cf. Mark 16:15, 16). According to Cameron, Jesus is here setting forth a vast program for this present age, and since many centuries have passed and still “all nations, and peoples, and kindreds, and tongues” have not yet been reached by the gospel, the idea of an imminent return of Christ “is absurd!”^[16]

It must be remembered once more that it is not a matter of God’s knowing and recording His advance program, but rather this question: “Would such a Scripture have caused the disciples to realize the extent

of the coming age and so have forced them to give up any personal belief in the imminent return of Christ?” When the vitality and zeal of Paul and other early converts, with their world-shaking testimony (Acts 17:6), is remembered, together with the size of the then-inhabited world (grown yet smaller by the unifying influence of Roman rule and Roman roads), it must be confessed that world evangelism was a greater possibility in Paul’s day than in ours. Nor was it the intent of the great Commission that Paul and his successors should attempt to convert the world, although postmillennialists have strained to read this into the text. It is most evident that the disciples did not so understand the Lord. When Peter addressed the council at Jerusalem, he did not say that all the Gentiles were going to be saved during this age, but that God would visit the Gentiles “to take out of them a people for his name” (Acts 15:14). Thiessen has commented:

What the Lord asked the disciples to do was to witness to all nations (Acts 1:8), and to make disciples of such as believed. That is, the Great Commission points out the destination of the gospel, but makes no prediction as to the success of the gospel.[17]

When the Great Commission says “all nations,” it cannot mean that the entirety of the world’s population must be saved before Christ can come. On such a basis, no generation would witness the Lord’s coming from glory, for hundreds are being born into the world for every new convert to Christ. But if it means that all nations must have an opportunity to hear the gospel, that fact alone largely explains the incentive and the tremendous missionary impetus of the early church. That this is the correct conclusion and was the view of early Christians, is borne out by the words of Paul to the Colossians:

. . . the gospel, which is come unto you, as it is in all the world ... and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven: whereof I Paul am made a minister (Col. 1:6, 23).

In the light of this overwhelming success granted to the missionary program of the early church, there is absolutely no indication that Matt. 28:18-20 was a barrier to their expectation that the Lord could have returned in their day.[18]

E. The Statements of Paul

Prominent in the case against imminency is the contention that the Apostle Paul did not, and could not, expect Christ to return in his lifetime. There seem to be three major objections to the idea that Paul viewed the coming of Christ as imminent. The first of these is that Paul wrote to Timothy concerning “latter times [when] some shall depart from the faith” (1 Tim. 4:1-3), and of “last days [when] perilous times shall come” (2 Tim. 3:1-5), men having “a form of godliness” but denying the power thereof. Although this is now recognized to be a picture of the end of the age, the sins listed are universal. Beyond any reasonable doubt, Christians of every century have found these verses applicable to the times in which they lived at least sufficiently so that they did not view the prophecy as yet awaiting fulfillment before the Lord could come. As has been noted, apostasy set in extremely early (Gal. 1:6; 3:1; 4:11; Acts 15:1, ff). While it is true that Paul’s predictions of final apostasy imply a development greater than any attained in his generation, Scripture does not declare that the consummation of apostasy must occur before the rapture. 2 Thess. 2:3 speaks of a “falling away,” and the revelation of the Man of Sin, but the Tribulation is here in view and not conditions of the Church age. The apostasy in its final form will reach its climax only under the Satan-inspired leadership of the Antichrist during the great Tribulation.

The second objection is that Paul was distinctly promised a long career as an apostle, and that he wrote under inspiration that he would travel to far off lands. At his conversion and baptism, he was told that he would bear the name of Christ “before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). He completed three missionary journeys. He visited Ephesus and promised to return. He planned

to visit the saints at Jerusalem, visit Rome, and journey on into Spain (Rom. 15:23-25). How could all these things be fulfilled if Paul viewed the coming of Christ as an imminent event?

The answer to the problem lies in the fact that Paul served the Lord in the spirit of the exhortation, “Occupy till I come” (Luke 19:13). All of his plans, including these proposed journeys, were contingent on the Lord’s leading and the further revelation of God’s will for his life. Thus it was that he conditioned his promise to the Ephesians, “But I will return again unto you, if God will (Acts 18:21). To the Christians at Rome he expressed his desire that “I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.” Often he had purposed to come unto them but had been hindered (Rom 1:9, 10, 13). He wrote plainly to the Corinthians: “But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will (1 Cor. 4:19).

Few men have served as well or suffered more for the cause of Christ than Paul, yet along with his service he ever expressed himself as one who believed the Lord might come at any time. To the Philippians, he wrote: “For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20). He prayed for the Thessalonian Christians that their “whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23). Likewise, he commended them for turning “to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven” (1 Thess. 1:9, 10). Such an attitude is a far cry from that attributed to him by posttribulationist Cameron:

He did not look for the “imminent” coming of the Lord. He had been too well instructed by the Prince of teachers that he did not make such a glaring mistake.[19]

The third part of the argument based on the life of Paul is not only that he would go “far hence unto the Gentiles” (Acts 22:21), but also that he would enjoy great length of years as the apostle to the Gentiles. This being the case, it is assured, Christ could not have returned in his lifetime. But it has been seen that it did not take long for Paul to reach the Gentiles; in fact, he had already been to the Macedonians (Acts 16). Carrying the gospel unto uttermost parts was rapidly accomplished (Col. 1:6, 23). As to the length of his life, Paul testified in 1 Cor. 15:30: “Why stand we in jeopardy every hour?” Of his suffering he recorded:

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep. ...

As one reads these and the following verses of 2 Cor. 11:23-28, he can scarcely conclude that Paul enjoyed great assurance of a long and healthy life. His purpose was not necessarily to live, but merely to magnify Christ Jesus the Lord in his body “whether it be by life, or by death” (Phil. 1:20, 21). For Paul, length of life was not contingent on his being the apostle to the Gentiles but upon his doing the will of God, and that very attitude enabled him to live and serve in the hope of an imminent return of Christ.[20]

F. Why This Attack on Imminency?

What is Cameron, and the many who follow his example, attempting to prove by his long and laborious arguments? What is the purpose of this detailed and supposedly unanswerable case which he strives so diligently to establish? Surely he has a deeper motive than trying to prove that first century saints were not looking for their Lord from glory. At the end of this argument, the motive is finally stated:

Thus, we find that the Apostles looked for intervening events between them and the Coming of the Lord. This attitude did not make His coming any less precious to their hearts. We are certainly in good company when we share the same faith and feeling, and it is still the blessed hope to our hearts.[21]

In other words, Cameron is attempting to prove that the second coming of Christ was a precious hope to the apostles, but not on the basis that they thought His coming was imminent, or that they might share in the rapture experience. What actually did make His coming a precious hope to them, when first they must look for the death of Peter and the death of Paul, and await the coming of the Spirit, the fall of Jerusalem, and the fulfillment of the Great Commission, giving time for the gospel to reach Spain and for the tares to grow up with the wheat, Cameron and his friends do not care to indicate. Can it be that the coming of Christ was a source of comfort and encouragement to the early church because, in spite of other predictions, they held it to be imminent? Assuredly, this is the truth of the case.

The doctrine of the imminent return of Christ is not under attack, however, because of its application to the early church. If this were a question which influenced only that one generation of believers, it might be easier to dismiss the entire matter. The posttribulational view robs every generation of an imminent, and consequently of a comforting and purifying hope. It argues that, because the rapture is not imminent in the first century, it is not imminent in any century, and it cannot be imminent now. Antichrist and the great Tribulation are ahead, and there is no basis for expecting Christ to come before such clearly scheduled events. It is unscriptural to take hope that this may be the year of His return. Even though He were to come in this generation, Tribulation and martyrdom are brought that much closer. No need to watch for Christ; watch for Antichrist – he will be here first! This is posttribulationalism!

The doctrine of the imminent return of Christ is absolutely fatal to such a posttribulational philosophy. Therefore, they press the attack against imminency and labor so hard to discount the doctrine. It may be concluded from the very weakness of the arguments by their chief spokesman that their task has not been accomplished, for they can be met and defeated on their own ground. Thus far, the consideration has been negative; the actual strength of the doctrine of imminency will be demonstrated more conclusively by the positive approach: the testimony of the Scriptures to the actual hope of the apostles and the attitude of the early church.

3. THE HOPE OF THE EARLY CHURCH

The confidence of the apostles concerning the possibility of an early advent has been touched on in the previous section and needs but a brief summary at this point. A consideration of the Scriptures involved will be sufficient to convince the average reader that the hope of Christ's coming was shared by the early church.

A. Testimony from Scripture

Among the words spoken by Christ to His disciples in the intimacy of the Passover chamber were those which promised a heavenly mansion and a certain return of Christ for His own: "I go to prepare a place for you. And ... I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2, 3). To this promise, the angels add their testimony: "This same Jesus ... shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). There is every indication that the apostles received such promises as applying directly unto themselves. In his letter to the Christians at Corinth, Paul writes words applicable to the entire Church throughout the present age: "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye ..." (1 Cor. 15:51, 52), and who can prove that Paul himself did not cherish the hope of being included among those that shall not "sleep"? When he wrote the Philippians, he reminded them to citizenship in heaven: "from whence also we look for the Saviour (Phil. 3:20).

When he wrote to the Colossians, part of his theme was: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4). When he wrote to the Thessalonians, he

commended them that they had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven” (1 Thess. 1:9, 10). Paul instructed his son in the faith, Timothy, and exhorted him to “keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 6:14).

Jewish converts were reminded that “yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Heb. 10:37). James exhorts those to whom he wrote: “Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (James 5:8). Peter remarks that those who scoff at the coming of the Lord “are willingly ignorant” (2 Pet. 3:4, 5), while John concludes the Revelation and closes the canon of Scripture with the glad cry: “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20). Here is testimony indeed to the hope of the early church!

It is fully recognized that these, and like precious promises, were given through the apostles and prophets to the entire church, and for the entire age. This alone is sufficient ground to prove that all generations during the church age have had the right to consider the coming of Christ as imminent. But those New Testament writings were sent to living people and real places, sent to answer actual problems in existing local churches, and it is undeniable that the generation which received the original autographs believed that they had a right to take these promises unto themselves. Nor did Paul rebuke the Thessalonian Christians for waiting “for his Son from heaven” on the grounds that Peter was not dead yet, or that Jerusalem was not yet destroyed!

The coming of Christ was just as imminent in the first century as it is today, by which is meant that from the viewpoint of the believer, Christ could have come in that generation. From the same Scriptures, men today look for His appearing. The promises are so worded that every age may view the coming as imminent and receive the blessing and comfort of such a hope, without any age or generation being able to say emphatically: “Christ will come in our day.”

B. The Hope of the First Three Centuries

Not only may it be demonstrated that the New Testament church held the coming of Christ to be imminent, but the same conclusion is reached from the writings of men of God in subsequent generations. Silver says of the Apostolic Fathers that “they expected the time was imminent because their Lord had taught to live in a watchful attitude.”^[22] Concerning the Anti-Nicene Fathers, he says: “By tradition they knew the faith of the Apostles. They taught the doctrine of the imminent and premillennial return of the Lord.”^[23] Something of the evidence for these claims will be presented at later point, under the consideration of the “historical problem” in chapter 10. Many authors can be cited to prove that a belief in the soon return of Christ existed throughout the first three centuries. Although a member of the liberal theological school, out of sheer honesty as a historian, A. Harnack writes:

In the history of Christianity three main forces are found to have acted as auxiliaries to the gospel. They have elicited the ardent enthusiasm of men whom the bare preaching of the gospel would have never made decided converts. These are a belief in the speedy return of Christ and in His glorious reign on earth.... First in point of time came the faith in the nearness of Christ’s second advent and the establishing of His reign of glory on the earth. Indeed, it appears so early that it might be questioned whether it ought not to be regarded as an essential part of the Christian religion.^[24]

The weight of the evidence from the writings of the apostles and from the faith of the early church on into the third century is solidly behind the claim that the Bible teaches imminency of the return of Christ.

4. THE NEW TESTAMENT EXHORTATIONS

There is in the New Testament a body of truth which rightfully belongs under the heading, “The hope of the early church,” yet it is sufficiently extensive to warrant separate treatment. It consists of the apostolic exhortations to look, watch, wait, and be ready for the coming of the Saviour. Herein lies additional positive and Scriptural proof for the imminency of His return. The argument, in brief, is as follows:

In Philippians 3:20, Paul speaks of citizenship in heaven, “From whence also we look for the Saviour.” Heb. 9:28 records, “unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” According to Titus 2:13, believers are to be “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

Paul ... does not ask us to look for the Tribulation, or the Antichrist, or for persecution and martyrdom, or for death, but for the return of Christ. If any of these events must precede the Rapture, then how can we help looking for them rather than the Lord’s coming? Such a view of the coming of the Lord can at best only induce a very general interest in the “blessed hope.”^[25]

The very fact that all generations of Christians have looked for and are exhorted to keep looking for the coming of the Lord, gives witness to the fact that Christ may come at any time. Yet, some have lost sight of this fact and have followed the philosophy of those servants who said: “My Lord delays his coming” (Matt. 24:48).

The fact that, according to an Act of Parliament adopted in 1752, the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer gives directions for calculating the feasts of the Church year as far ahead as A.D. 8500, was not calculated to convince Darby and his associates a century ago that the bishops and other clergy of the Established Church were living in eager expectancy of the advent. It indicated rather that they regarded the Church of England as firmly established on earth and expected it to remain their almost “world without end.”^[26]

To the exhortations to look for the return of Christ are added the similar exhortations to watch. This command is given to the Church in view of the rapture in 1 Thess. 5:6. “Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.” The same exhortation is given to the church at Sardis, in Rev. 3:3. “If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.” A similar command to watch is given to believers, particularly Israel, who will be under the persecution of the Beast during the great Tribulation. “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (Matt. 24:42; cf., 25:13; Rev. 16:15). “Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching” (Luke 12:37; cf., 21:36). Thus, the attitude of watchfulness is becoming to any believer in Christ, and the exhortation to watch seems to be applied to the second coming as a whole. Certainly the language of Mark 13:32-37, although given in the setting of the Lord’s return to earth, may be used by application as a general exhortation to all saints through the course of the entire age:

But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.

For these many years, believers have been looking and watching for their Lord from glory. They

have believed that, while His coming might not be immediate, nor necessarily in their lifetime, His coming could be very soon. Weary from the presence of sin or in pain from the presence of sickness, in the morning they have said, "Perhaps today!" and in the evening they have whispered, "Perhaps tonight!" They have "loved his appearing," viewing it as imminent, and so have watched for the return of the Saviour. Yet, with it all they have lived in accord with that other most practical exhortation, "Occupy till I come." As Blackstone well says:

True watching is an attitude of mind and heart which would joyfully and quickly turn from any occupation to meet our Beloved, rapturously exclaiming "this is the Lord; we have waited for Him."^[27]

Needless to say, the posttribulational view discredits and robs the Biblical exhortations to watchfulness of any real and significant meaning. This was clearly seen by the honored James H. Brookes:

If the Church must pass through the tribulation, it is useless to watch for Him daily. According to this view the apostasy must first set in like a flood, and sweep away the great mass of professing Christianity, the Antichrist in his proud lawlessness is to be developed, and the Jews restored in unbelief to their own land. None of these things have occurred [the latter yet only in part]: and hence it is impossible for those who hold the error, here condemned, to heed the Saviour's admonition, "Watch ye therefore, and pray always," uttering the cry of the longing apostle, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus," Rev. 22:20. They put themselves out of sympathy with the mind of the Master, for they postpone his advent at least for some years.^[28]

The third exhortation in view of the second coming of Christ is to wait. Such is the attitude of believers who wait for the redemption of their bodies (Rom. 8:23). Those at Corinth came behind in no gift, "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:7), while the Thessalonian believers served the living and true God and were waiting for His Son from heaven (1 Thess. 1:10; cf., 2 Thess. 3:5). Certainly, this is a normal attitude for redeemed men who view the coming of their Lord as imminent. One might expect that the command to wait (Luke 12:36) and to be ready (Luke 12:40; Matt. 24:44) should be given prophetically to men in the great Tribulation who have refused the mark of the Beast which would seal their doom (Rev. 14:9, 10). These will be waiting and eagerly watching for the One who will destroy their enemies with the brightness of His appearing (2 Thess. 2:8). It is not to be expected, however, that these same exhortations should be given generally to the Church, as they are, unless it is intended for every generation of believers to be characterized by an attitude of watchful expectancy, viewing the coming of Christ for His Church as imminent throughout the age.

It is not necessary for these commands to watch, wait and be ready to be technical words used only of the rapture, or of the revelation. It has been demonstrated that these exhortations were given to the first century Church and are applicable to the whole age, which in itself supports the doctrine of imminency. It is only when the believer realizes that Christ's coming may be very soon, and must be before the unveiling of Antichrist and the day of God's outpoured wrath, that he can express the hope:

I am waiting for the dawning, Of the bright and blessed day:
When the darkstone night of sorrow, Shall have vanished far away:
When forever with the Saviour, Far beyond this vale of tears,
I shall swell the song of worship, Through the everlasting years.
I am looking at the brightness, (See, it shineth from afar.)
Of the clear and joyous beaming, Of the "Bright and Morning Star";
Through the dark grey mist of morning, Do I see its glorious light;
Then away with every shadow, Of this sad and weary night.
I am waiting for the coming, Of the Lord who died for me;

Oh! His words have thrilled my spirit: "I will come again for thee,"
I can almost hear his footfall, On the threshold of the door,
And my heart, my heart is longing, To be His for evermore!

To avoid the full force of the argument for imminency from these exhortations to look, to watch, and to wait, posttribulationists have tried to prove by illustration that scheduled events before the coming do not keep us from watching for Christ Himself. When you stand at the station awaiting a train which bears a beloved friend, it is argued, you watch the signals. As long as the semaphore stands at right angles, you know the train has not passed the last station, but you are watching, not for the dropping of the semaphore, but for your friend who is near.^[29] Similarly, you wait for the royal parade and for the sight of the king. In the distance, you hear the band which leads the parade, but as you watch for the first sight of the band, in reality you look, not for the band, but for the king himself.

From these illustrations, posttribulationists would have the Christian believe that Antichrist, Tribulation and wrath from God do not prevent them from looking beyond for the coming of the King. These other events are but the "band" which precedes the royal carriage.

However, it is the native responsibility of an illustration to at least resemble the thing illustrated. Waiting for a signal to drop is certainly a harmless activity, but hardly illustrative of seven years of horror such as the world never before has known, when men shall seek death and shall not find it, when they shall gnaw their tongues in pain and cry for the mountains to fall upon them to hide them from the wrath of the One who sits upon His throne. The tuneful band which gaily precedes the royal monarch scarcely exemplifies the prospect of war and famine, of unparalleled death and destruction, of conflict with the great Beast and a martyr's grave at the end. Such illustrations, typical of posttribulationist argument, do not illustrate, but hide the truth. The only thing illustrated is the tendency of those who reject an "any moment" rapture, whether they be posttribulationists or amillennialists, to spiritualize away any true significance to the Tribulation period, making it the equivalent of any other time of persecution endured by the people of God. By their clutching at such straws for their illustrations, the truth of imminency is not injured. It is rather vindicated.

The Scriptures couple with the exhortations to look, watch and to wait three distinct characteristics of the rapture which further indicate that this event must precede the Tribulation. For the Christian in this age, the coming of Christ is a "blessed hope," a "comforting hope," and a "purifying hope." Those who love the Lord are constrained to look for "that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13). They are not to sorrow over loved ones who are "asleep" as men which have no hope, for Christ shall raise them also, "and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Indeed, the first comfort given to the bewildered disciples who beheld their Lord ascend into heaven and who then stood gazing into the skies, was: "This same Jesus ... shall so come in like manner" (Acts 1:11). Previously, they had been comforted by the same hope: "Let not your heart be troubled ... I go and prepare a place for you. And ... I will come again and receive you unto myself" (John 14:1, 3). This return of the Lord is later signified by John as a purifying hope when he said: "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3; cf. 2:28; 2 Pet. 3:14). Paul himself exhorted: "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand" (Phil. 4:5).

There is not a little wrong with any system of interpretation which destroys the force of exhortations such as these, painting over the bright hues of the hope of an imminent return of Christ with the somber shades of impending Tribulation. Yet Frost introduces his chapter entitled "The Coming Posttribulationist" with these words:

My purpose now, will be to indicate that the second advent, according to the Scripture, may not

momentarily be expected as it will not take place until God has fulfilled certain large purposes of His and has brought to pass the last great testing and purifying of His people in the midst of furnace fires. As touching this last aspect of our subject, let me frankly admit that it is not an inviting one, for all of us shrink from suffering of any kind. But let me add that we must not evade prophetic presentations simply because they are dark and sinister.[30]

Now it is freely admitted that the Tribulation will be “dark and sinister.” There is nothing attractive about the rider on the pale horse, called Death, who is followed by another called Hell, both of whom kill with the sword and with hunger, with death and the beasts of the earth. There is nothing attractive about the torment of hellish locusts, nor the vile rivers of waters turned to blood, nor the plagues of grievous sores upon the bodies of men, nor the great hail out of heaven nor the winepress of the wrath of almighty God!

Neither is there anything particularly attractive about a system of interpretation which substitutes the expectation of these trials for the blessed hope of God’s people. It is not amiss to ask those who mistakenly would take the Church, Christ’s bride, into the time of “Jacob’s trouble,” if for them these sorrows comprise the “blessed hope.” Is it for death and hell and wrath that one must watch? Does the prospect of grievous sores and hellish pestilence comprise the prelude to the “comforting hope” of the Church? Can the Christian fully rejoice in the knowledge of His soon coming, believing that those who share the rapture experience must first endure the greatest hour of torment in earth’s history and that, at best, the privilege of rapture awaits only the few who escape the Beast’s rage and a martyr’s death? The pretribulational interpretation of prophecy may have some difficulties, but none so grave and far-reaching as these!

The very fact that the primary passage on the rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4:13-18) declares that this message is one of comfort, makes a posttribulational rapture incredible. Looking forward to seven years of intense suffering, the “purifying of His people in the midst of furnace fires,” as Frost puts it, is a doubtful source of hope or comfort. It is of no solace or encouragement to tell suffering saints that far worse things are in store for them! There is all the difference in the world between looking for the Lord and looking for the Antichrist, the Devil’s counterfeit Messiah. The plainly intended meaning of the Thessalonians passage is that saints should be comforted by the prospect of Christ’s coming. There is not the slightest hint that distressed saints must endure still greater distress in the Tribulation. Rather than enter that period of anguish and torment, it would be far better to die, for to be absent from the body means to be gloriously present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). Death is a defeated enemy, having lost its sting by Christ’s victory over the grave (1 Cor. 15:54-57), but it is an enemy nevertheless, and as such is of doubtful comfort. Yet death is far to be preferred to the great Tribulation.

Only one position does honor to the Scriptures which speak of hope and comfort, and only one interpretation makes sense in view of the exhortations to look, wait, and watch for the Lord from glory. This is to understand and to be assured that God will not thrust His Church into the Tribulation period. Others may declare these prophetic portions “dark and sinister.” Still others may try to harmonize life and death, blessing and cursing, comfort and the prospect of martyr blood, but the instructed Christian will encourage himself in the Lord and in the hope of His imminent, pretribulational return. With this hope, Christians will cheer and sustain one another, and in the light of such a hope they will serve Him, purifying their lives in order to have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

Oh joy! Oh delight! Should we go without dying:
No sickness, no sadness, no pain, and no crying!
Caught up in the clouds with the Lord into glory
When Jesus receives His own!

5. THE IMMINENT RETURN: AN INCENTIVE TO HOLINESS

Not only does the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ keep the promises and exhortations connected with His coming in their proper and Scriptural perspective, but also this truth is one of the greatest incentives to the Church for vitality of service and holiness of life. Charles R. Erdman has stated the case clearly:

The fact of the Parousia has been, in all ages of the Church, a source of inspiration and cheer. Upon it are based exhortations to purity, fidelity, holiness, hope, and practically all the virtues of a Christian life.[31]

Gibbon, the author of the immense work, “The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,” and himself a bitter critic of all things pertaining to Christianity, is forced to admit as he writes concerning the coming of Christ:

Those who understood in their literal sense the discourses of Christ Himself were obliged to expect the Second and glorious Coming of the Son of Man before that generation was totally distinguished.... As long as for wise purposes this error was permitted to exist in the Church, it was productive of the most salutary effects on the faith and practice of Christians who lived in the awful expectation of that moment.[32]

It stands to reason that Christians, who believe that Christ may return and snatch away His own at almost any moment and that their reward at the Bema seat judgment is determined by their behavior and service before the rapture experience, have a tremendous ever-present incentive to live well pleasing in the sight of the Lord. Now it is true that the doctrine of the second coming is not the only (and may not even be the chief) guide for Christian behavior. We have the whole Word of God and must be led by its plain and direct instructions for Christian living. Nevertheless, belief in the imminent return of the Lord does provide a tremendous incentive for right behavior, which may well explain why the Spirit gave the second coming promises in such a way that they have been appropriated by believers of every generation. It is the evil servant, who is persuaded in his heart: “My lord delayeth his coming,” who proceeds to smite his fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunken (Matt. 24:49-51). Such is the ill effect upon the behavior of men who do not look for the Master’s return.

It has been seen that the coming of Christ for His own is a “purifying hope.” In Titus 2:12, 13, looking for Christ is linked with living soberly, righteously, and godly. In 1 Thess. 5:6, the second coming issues in sobriety; James 5:7, 8, in patience; Philippians 1:10, in sincerity; 1 John 3:3, in purity; 1 Thess. 3:12, 13, in brotherly love and holiness, and so forth. Blackstone lists forty uses made of the doctrine of the second coming in the New Testament, and concludes:

It is employed to arm the appeals, to point the arguments, and to enforce the exhortations. What is there more practical in any other doctrine?[33]

The value of the truth of imminency in the life and outlook of the saints is well summarized by Brookes:

If we heartily and practically believe that the Lord may come for His people at any moment, it must separate from the world, and kill selfishness, and blast the roots of personal ambition, and increase brotherly love, and intensify zeal, and deepen concern for the salvation of the lost, and give comfort in affliction, and put us in a state of preparedness for the great interview, like a bride arraying herself to meet her bridegroom. Oh, there is no truth in the Bible that can bring greater blessing to the soul, when received in the power of the Holy Ghost, but this blessing is largely hindered if we are taught to expect that our gathering together unto him lies beyond the appalling tribulation that shall come upon all the

world.[34]

From the standpoint of a pastor or evangelist, the value of teaching and preaching the imminency of the return of Christ is plainly marked. Preach that the coming of Christ from glory is an imminent event, that it may transpire even in our day, and the people are blessed and hearts throb with a joyful anticipation. Teach that the Church must face the fires of the great Tribulation, and you send people back to their homes in despondency and dismay. Preach the posttribulational view to believers who hope and look for His return, and discord and heartache is sown in the midst. Multiplied examples that this is true could readily be cited. Teach the imminent return of Christ and people are renewed in hope and courage, despite the surrounding gloom.

It is important to remember that in teaching the doctrine of the second coming, the main theme and center of attraction must be Christ Himself, and not merely a human desire to escape Tribulation, or even the holy desire of gaining heaven. Christ is the central theme of the Bible. He is the one of whom prophets and apostles wrote and to whom angels and redeemed hosts ascribe praise and glory and honor. Christ, and Christ alone, must be our hope – not the glory of the coming, not the joy and benefit His coming will bring, but Christ alone! Our desire is unto Him. Our vision must be clarified and our ears must be attuned for the sight and sound of Him who promised, “Surely, I come quickly.” The next thing for the Church, that long-promised event which is nearest and is therefore imminent, is His coming. May the hearts of all who read these lines be stirred afresh to answer, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

6. SUMMARY AND APPEAL

It is sincerely hoped that those who have pursued this argument for pretribulationalism thus far, including those who may not be in full agreement with the position herein presented, may be caused to rejoice in the fact and the assurance of Christ’s coming. May personal spiritual values not be lost in the interest of drawing theological distinctions!

As for the discussion at hand, the arguments of Robert Cameron, as spokesman for the case against imminency, have been presented and, it is believed, fairly and conclusively answered. Not only did the early church look for the return of Christ, she was exhorted and encouraged by the apostles to do so. It is said that a common salutation between Christians in the early days of the Church was “Maranatha!” – Our Lord is coming! Predictions concerning the death of Peter or Paul, and so forth, never seemed to be a hindrance to first century belief in the Lord’s imminent return, and most certainly have been no obstacle since that century.

It has been established from the New Testament that the coming of Christ was the hope of the early church, and to those Scriptures was added the weight of the constant exhortations to look, watch, and wait for the Lord’s return. It has been seen that the posttribulation rapture theory is incongruous with the fact that the rapture comprises the blessed hope, the comforting hope, and the purifying hope of the Church. It has been demonstrated that Christ’s coming for His own is to the Church one of her great incentives to holiness and service, and that this attains full force only when the rapture is viewed as pretribulational. Thus, the New Testament Scriptures widely testify to the truth and practical value of the imminent return of our Lord from glory. Since, then, Christians look for Christ and not for Antichrist, and for the joy of His coming rather than for Tribulation wrath and despair, let them be careful to service Christ faithfully, trimming their lamps to shine more brightly, walking the path of this life with many an upward glance to Him whose coming is their hope.

[1] Arthur T. Pierson, The Coming of the Lord, p. 53.

- [2] Robert Cameron, *Scriptural Truth About the Lord's Return*, pp. 21-69.
- [3] *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- [4] *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- [5] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- [6] *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- [7] *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- [8] Edmund Shackleton, *Will the Church Escape the Great Tribulation?*, pp. 31, 32, cited by Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, p. 231.
- [9] Oswald Smith, *God's Future Program: Will the Church Escape the Tribulation?* cited by John J. Scruby, *The Great Tribulation: The Church's Supreme Test*, p. 75.
- [10] Henry C. Thiessen, "Will the Church Pass Through the Tribulation?" *Bibliotheca Sacra*, XCII (July-September, 1935), 310.
- [11] Cameron, *op. cit.*, pp. 28, 29.
- [12] The hope of Christ's coming in the first three centuries will be discussed in chapter 10.
- [13] Thiessen, *op. cit.*, p. 310.
- [14] Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
- [15] Cameron, *loc. cit.*
- [16] *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- [17] Thiessen, *Will the Church Pass Through the Tribulation?*, p. 52.
- [18] Reese, *op. cit.*, writes a chapter entitled "The Great Missionary Commission and Its Fulfillment," pp. 108-119. The entire effort is an attack on Darby and some of his followers who applied the Great Commission to the evangelistic zeal of the Jewish remnant during the Tribulation period. Reese attempts to pin this admittedly ultra-dispensational interpretation to pretribulationism as a whole, and then proceeds to refute the view with sarcasm and ridicule. While it may be a clever debater's device to give the impression that the opponent's position is unsound by attributing to it, and then attacking, an extreme view on a minor point, the value of such misrepresentation is questionable.
- [19] Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
- [20] In addition to these major objections to an early belief in the imminency of Christ's appearing, one or two other trifling objections are brought forward, such as the promised destruction of Jerusalem. Luke 21:20-24 records this prediction of Christ, and it is argued that here was another known and clearly prophesied event which separated early Christians from any hope of being in the rapture. When, however, it is noted that the time of this destruction was not foretold – it might have come much earlier than 70 A.D. – and when it is realized that the destruction might have been part of the time of trouble after the rapture, this objection is robbed of all its force.
- [21] Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
- [22] Jesse Forest Silver, *The Lord's Return: Seen in History and Scripture as Premillennial and Imminent*, pp. 62, 63.
- [23] *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- [24] A. Harnack, "Millennium," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (ninth edition), XVI, 314.
- [25] Thiessen, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, XCII (July-September, 1935), 307.
- [26] Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, p. 167.
- [27] W. E. Blackstone, *Jesus Is Coming*, p. 65.
- [28] James H. Brookes, "Kept Out of the Hour," *Our Hope*, VI (November, 1899), 154.
- [29] Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
- [30] Henry W. Frost, *The Second Coming of Christ*, p. 202. Italics added.
- [31] Charles R. Erdman, "Parousia," *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, IV, 2521-F.
- [32] Cited by I. M. Haldeman, *The History of the Doctrine of Our Lord's Return*, p. 17.
- [33] Blackstone, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
- [34] Brookes, *op. cit.*, p. 157.