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"Prophetic Truth maintained from the Apostles until now"

Synopsis of a message preached at Kilskeery Annual Conference on Saturday 31st October, 2015,

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An audio recording of this message is available [here](#)

"Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus....But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them." 2 Timothy 1:13, 3:14

There were 'things' which Paul taught Timothy which he wanted this young man to 'hold fast' and to 'continue...in'. "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them," 2 Timothy 3:14.

These 'things', which Timothy had heard preached and taught by Paul, are described as 'sound words' in 2 Timothy 1:13. "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."

By 'sound words' are meant doctrines, namely, the great doctrinal truths which make up the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is not referring to mere words, for the servants of the Lord are warned against striving about words, to no profit. "Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers," 2 Timothy 2:14.

The Greek word translated 'words' in 2 Timothy 1:13, is translated as 'doctrine' in Hebrews 6:1. "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God."

Among these 'sound words' or doctrines, that Paul preached and taught, are references to the second coming of Jesus Christ to this earth. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come," 2 Timothy 3:1. See also 2 Timothy 4:1,8. "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

This was an important subject to Paul.

The importance of the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ can be observed in the swiftness of Paul's introduction of this subject to the church at Thessalonica. In a two to three week ministry in Thessalonica, which brought about the formation of a New Testament church, Paul taught these new believers about the second coming. A short time after he had left Thessalonica he wrote two epistles which had as their main theme the second coming of Jesus Christ. The second of these epistles was written to correct the false teaching and practice that had arisen after his departure. The point to notice is how soon Paul introduced the subject of the Lord's second coming to these new believers. There are some who minister for years and seldom, if ever, preach on the second coming. Paul covered the subject within a few weeks among new believers!

With respect to Christ's second coming the New Testament uses three particular terms to describe that coming:

1. There is His 'Coming'. The Greek word is 'parousia'. This refers to the Saviour's arrival; to His advent; to His presence here on earth. We hold to the visible and personal return of our Lord Jesus Christ to this



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earth. "Behold He cometh!" is the cry of Scripture.

2. There is His 'Revelation'. The Greek word is akin to 'apocalypse'. This refers to an unveiling. Christ Jesus shall be revealed as the Son of God and God the Son. "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels," 2 Thessalonians 1:7. This world knows Him not now but one day will.

3. There is His 'Appearing'. The Greek word is 'epiphany'. It refers to the illustriousness and the splendour of His coming and His revelation. He is coming in great power and glory. This word 'epiphany' is used to refer to both the first and the second comings. Paul used this word in 2 Timothy 1:10 to refer to the first coming. "But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

The coming of the wise men to worship the King of the Jews is often referred to as the Epiphany. This gives an indication of the meaning of this term. These wise men came to worship an illustrious person. They came to worship the Messiah as a King.

At Christ's second appearing He is going to be seen as the King of kings. He is coming as heaven's exalted King, as the King coming to reign!

Paul also employs the third of these three terms, in this second epistle to Timothy, to refer to the second coming. He speaks of Christ's 'appearing', or His 'epiphany', see 2 Timothy 4:1,8. Paul has in mind the second 'appearing' of Jesus Christ, this time in great glory.

Therefore, along with other important doctrinal truths, Paul exhorts Timothy to hold fast this form of sound words. The form of sound words which Timothy is to maintain includes the Scriptural teaching relating to Christ's appearing. That brings us to consider this subject:

Prophetic truth maintained from the Apostles until now.

Consider:

I. THE PENMEN OF SCRIPTURE LEFT A LEGACY OF PROPHETIC TRUTH TO BE HELD FAST.

There is a body of 'Prophetic Truth', given to us in the Scriptures that is to be held fast. Just the same, and every bit as important as the Body of divinity in relation to the person of Christ or the atoning work of Christ.

Each of the New Testament writers had something to record regarding the Saviour's second coming. The Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John did so. Paul, Peter, James, and Jude also were inspired to write upon this important subject.

These truths regarding Christ's second coming, and the future fulfillment of the first resurrection, His reign on earth, the restored Temple at Jerusalem and then the final judgment were handed on by the Apostles to future generations. This view of prophecy is otherwise known as 'Futurism', that is, that most of the prophetic passages of the Word of God, relating to the second coming, await their fulfillment in the period immediately preceding that second coming.

Not true

This point is worthy of emphasis so as to counter, and contradict, those who say otherwise. There are those who spread the falsehood that the prophetic view known as 'futurism' commenced with a Jesuit priest in 1585. The originator was supposedly a Jesuit, called Francisco de Ribera, who published it in order to oppose the interpretation which identified the Papacy as the Antichrist and the Church of Rome as 'Babylon'. This is simply not true, and to propagate that view is to spread a lie and no lie is of the truth.

The belief in futurism flows from the teaching of the New Testament. Down through Church history God



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has raised up those who have maintained a witness to Prophetic Truth known as futurism. Here are a few examples of the many proofs of this fact of history.

Philip Schaff, an American church historian, who doesn't hold to 'futurism' himself, gives this summary of the early church's view.

"The most striking point in the eschatology [doctrine of last things] of the ante-Nicene age [Apostles to Council of Nicea 325AD] is the prominent chiliasm, ... that is the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment. It was indeed not the doctrine of the church embodied in any creed or form of devotion, but a widely current opinion of distinguished teachers, such as Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, and Lactantius."

Schaff speaks of a belief in 'Chiliasm', or belief in the one thousand year reign of Christ on earth, as being prominent during the two hundred years immediately after the time of the Apostles.

Source

Where did this belief in a thousand year reign of Christ on earth come from?

The answer: it flowed from the teaching of the Apostles and the New Testament. It is that body of prophetic truth which flows from the Apostles that is to be held fast!

Here are some quotations of those who followed in the very footsteps of the apostles.

- **Papias** (AD 60-130), the bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia, Asia Minor, said: "There will be a millennium after the resurrection of the dead, when the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this earth; ... there will be a millennium after the resurrection from the dead, when the personal reign of Christ will be established on this earth."
- **Justin Martyr** (AD 100-165), in his Dialogue With Trypho a Jew ca. AD 140, said: "But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, as the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare."
- **Irenaeus**, a disciple of Polycarp, who knew the Apostle John, wrote a work entitled: Against Heresies, in which he said: "John, therefore, did distinctly foresee the first 'resurrection of the just,' and the inheritance in the kingdom of the earth...and what the prophets have prophesied concerning it harmonize" [ie. with John's visions].
- **Tertullian**, who gave us the Latin word 'Trinity', stated the following: "But we do confess that a kingdom is promised to us upon the earth, although before heaven, only in another state of existence; inasmuch as it will be after the resurrection for a thousand years in the divinely-built city of Jerusalem, 'let down from heaven,' which the apostle also calls 'our mother from above;' and, while declaring that our citizenship is in heaven, he predicts of it that it is really a city in heaven. This both Ezekiel had knowledge of and the Apostle John beheld."

II. LIKE MUCH OF GOD'S TRUTH THIS WITNESS HAS EBBED AND FLOWED AT VARIOUS TIMES

Has not every part of God's truth been neglected, or disregarded, down through Church history at some time or other? The period prior to the Reformation was not called "The Dark Ages" for nothing!

What ignorance prevailed about salvation during those times of spiritual darkness! We rightly remember the Reformation and its rediscovery of orthodox, biblical truth relating to many areas of Gospel truth, especially that of salvation. Sometimes the light has burned very low indeed. There wasn't much light across Europe for centuries, until the Dawn of the Reformation.



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The rediscovery of Irenaeus's work, 'Against Heresies' in 1571 helped revive an interest in futurism in the early 1600s and influenced the Westminster Divines.

Robert Baillie was one of the Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly. In his Letters and Journals there is recorded his observations of the Assembly's proceedings. Baillie makes an extremely interesting statement about the views of the Westminster Divines with regard to the End Times. In modern English the quote reads: "... most of the chief divines here, not only Independents, but others such as Twisse, Marshall, Palmer, and many more, are express Chiliasts." This is something forgotten and overlooked in many Reformed circles today!

Dr William Twisse was the Prolocutor, or Moderator, of the Westminster Assembly, until his death shortly before the Assembly concluded its work. Stephen Marshall was one of the leading compilers of The Directory of Public Worship, so beloved and quoted by many in the Reformed camp today.

This belief in 'Chiliasm' among the Westminster Divines is corroborated from other sources. In the re-published sermons of Dr William Cunningham, the account is told in the Introduction of a minister who sought to engage Dr Cunningham, that mighty Scottish Presbyterian giant, in conversation about the Pre-millennial return of Jesus Christ to this earth. Seeking to obtain from Dr Cunningham a verdict on what he thought of these end-time views this minister received an interesting reply. Dr Cunningham said that: "He saw nothing to alarm or repel in views which were entertained by some of the soundest among the Westminster divines, but that, for himself, he had not as yet had leisure to look into the matter."

Dr Cunningham states that these prophetic views, known as 'Futurism', were held by the 'soundest' among the Westminster Divines.

Men like Andrew and Horatius Bonar, Robert Murray-McCheyne, C. H. Spurgeon, and J. C. Ryle also held these views on prophecy.

Another giant of the faith, Augustus Toplady, well known for his hymn: "Rock of Ages," once said: "I am one of those old-fashioned people...who believe the doctrine of the Millennium: and that there will be two distinct resurrections of the dead, first, of the just, secondly, of the unjust; which last resurrection, of the reprobate, will not commence till a thousand years after the resurrection of the elect. In this glorious interval of one thousand years, Christ, I apprehend, will reign, in person, over the kingdom of the just..."

We, therefore, stand in good company when we seek to hold fast to these same prophetic truths in this our day and age. We follow in a long line of mighty servants of God!

III. INTEREST IN THIS BODY OF PROPHETIC TRUTH WILL NOTICEABLY INCREASE AS CHRIST'S RETURN APPROACHES.

Daniel chapter 12, verse 4 is an important verse in this light. At this stage in Daniel's visions he was commanded by the Lord: "to shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."

This passage of Scripture highlights certain facts:

1. Daniel's visions relate to the time of the end. Daniel was to "shut up the words and seal the book even to the time of the end." Daniel's visions are visions which shall be fulfilled leading up the coming of Jesus Christ again to this earth.

The Book was still sealed in John's time. John saw a book sealed with seven seals. No one could open that Book but "the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof," Revelation 5:5.

These visions of Daniel and John both relate to the time just prior to the coming again of Jesus Christ.



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2. Interest in these things, which are now 'shut up' and 'sealed', will increase as we progress towards the end of the age. The visions relate to the end of the age. When that appointed time approaches 'many' will be stirred up to inquire into these things recorded in this Book.

3. Those whose interest is stirred will spare no pains, or cost, to obtain a knowledge of these things. "...many shall run to and fro." If we let Scripture interpret Scripture we can easily understand what this statement means. Look at Amos 8:11-12: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it."

Here is the antithesis of Daniel 12:4. Nevertheless the phrase "many shall run to and fro" refers to seeking after the Word of God. Not seeking a word from God, but seeking the Word of the Lord.

In Amos' case they shall not find it. In Daniel's case they shall find it.

There will be a heightened desire to read, study and meditate upon the prophetic Scriptures; to compare one passage with another; to compare spiritual things with spiritual, in order to obtain the mind of Christ as to His second coming. There will be an increased desire to peruse carefully the writings of such who have gone before. People shall go 'to and fro' to converse with those who can give them an understanding of these things.

4. Knowledge shall increase. The Lord promises greater understanding and greater knowledge. The knowledge of prophetic truth generally, and the writings of Daniel particularly, will increase as the end of the age approaches. These things, which Daniel wrote of, will appear clearer and plainer the nearer the accomplishment of them is.

Let us continue to hold fast these sound words!