

During the first three centuries after Christ ascended to heaven His people devoted themselves to carrying out the great commission. Both emphases were always before them. They constantly witnessed to their Saviour. At the same time they kept looking for the coming of their Lord from heaven, knowing that He would Himself establish His wonderful kingdom.

After Roman emperors had repeatedly tried to destroy Christianity they found it necessary to confess that the persecutions had failed. A new emperor, Constantine, adopted Christianity as his religion.

There has been much argument as to whether Constantine was really a Christian. I believe that there is little doubt that he was indeed a sincere Christian, though in many ways an untrained one. A man in his position is apt to be flattered and praised instead of being taught and helped in his Christian life.

Soon there was a great change in the attitude of some of the leaders of the Christian church, and this new attitude became more and more widespread. Now that the Roman emperor was a Christian, men began to think that the victory had already been won, and that the "city of God" was being established on earth, replacing the former pagan empire. All world conditions would soon be brought in line with Christian purposes. The kingdom of Christ would soon be completely realized.

How mistaken these leaders were! Before many decades had passed the fact that the Roman empire was declining became obvious. Violence and disorder appeared on every hand. Soon the western part of the empire was broken into many small parts. For several centuries civilization almost disappeared from western Europe; then a long period of gradual development was necessary before Europe could again be an important center of world progress. God allowed the Dark Ages to come as evidence that human effort cannot bring in the kingdom of God. It is only by God's power, shown through the victory of Christ at His return, that the kingdom of God will be established on earth.