

God considers it important that we take them to heart and accept the logical conclusions that flow from them. This being the case, the conclusion seems plain, that the first absolutely clear evidence the Christian will have, that the return of Christ will be in one century rather than in another, will be the sudden snatching up of the church to meet the Lord in the air. Clearly there can never be a day when one can state with certainty, that the church will not go to join its Lord on that particular day.

While a few statements in the Gospels seem at first sight not to fit with this conclusion, each of these yields readily on close examination. There is only one passage in the Bible which seemed really difficult to reconcile with this oft-repeated teaching. Strangely enough, that passage is in II Thess. 2, and hence addressed to the very people to whom Paul, in I Thess. 5, had given an exhortation to godly Christian living based on the fact that the Lord might suddenly and unexpectedly call His church to meet Him in the air.

The problem relates to II Thess. 2:1-12, and more particularly to verses 2 and 3. As these verses stand in the Authorized Version, they seem directly to contradict the rest of the New Testament. They seem to say: "Don't get excited and think that the day of Christ is at hand. That day cannot come until two striking events occur: first, there must be a falling away; and secondly the man of sin must be revealed and must try to make people worship him as God." It sounds as if Paul is teaching the exact opposite of the many verses in the gospels (and even in I Thessalonians) which urge Christians to be ready for the return of Christ at any time, since they never know when it ~~sign~~^{may} come.

However, a moment's thought makes one wonder whether this can be the true interpretation, even aside from the apparent contradiction of so many other passages. Two signs seem to be given, so that one need never think of the return of the Lord as even possibly at hand until these two signs are fulfilled. The first of these signs is designated in the Authorized Version as "a falling away". Does this mean that the return of Christ ~~may~~^{not} be near, until there is an apostasy from the faith? If so, it cannot have been a useful sign for any great length of time, since the