

THE CELESTIAL CONFLICT

STAND! This is the thrice repeated watchword for those who occupy the celestial allotment which is ours in Christ Jesus (Eph.6:10-17; 1:3-14). In case of attack by the cohorts of the heavenly hosts, *withstand!* (Eph.6:13). God has granted us an allotment among the celestials. It is only as we tenant the tract entrusted to us that we have a place to stand. It is only when we hold this ground that the enemy will seek to dislodge us. Then alone will there be warfare. This is not the rest we have at God's right hand, neither is it a war of aggression. Those who find the faith of Ephesians will have to fight to hold the ground they have gained. There are unseen strategists who will seek to dispossess them. There are powers of darkness who will assault their position and drive them from it.

When Israel was in the wilderness, *Forward!* was their watchword. The wilderness warfare, however, was, in a sense unnecessary. It was the result of their refusal to hearken to Yahweh. Once the land had been conquered, after they had taken possession, their aggressive warfare was at an end. Then it was their duty to stand upon it and withstand the onslaughts of all who sought to drive them from it. When faith was low and valor scarce, the people fled, and left their allotment to their enemies. On occasions such as these the mighty men of David gained their fame by defending their fields against the Philistines. We have no earthly allotment to hold, but we have a heavenly inheritance. No forward move is necessary now, for the fields are ours by faith. But there is need abundant to stand firm on the ground we have gained and withstand every effort to dislodge us from our allotment.

To those who confuse contexts, God's Word is full of contradictions. One of the great truths of a previous portion of Ephesians is that we are *seated* together among the celestials (Eph.2:6). There is relaxation and rest. Now this seems to be denied for we are exhorted to *stand*, clad with all the accouterments of conflict. There is vigilance and warfare. Both are true, *in their contexts*. Both are false *out* of their contexts. As related to Christ Jesus, as members of His body, we have no work to do, for He has completed it all Himself. But, as related to *God*, as *enjoying an allotment* among the celestials, we need to be invigorated with God's mighty strength, and to stand in His protective panoply. The allotment is ours. We shall enter upon its tenancy in fact when we are called above. But now we need to hold it by *faith*. There is where the danger lies. There failure may be found. There the saints have practically forfeited the enjoyment of their celestial blessings.

This warfare is almost unknown in Christendom today for the simple reason that few have even heard of the territory on which they are supposed to stand. The Adversary's stratagems have been so successful, the sovereignties and authorities, the world might of this darkness, the spiritual forces of wickedness among the celestials have so outmaneuvered the saints that they are running around in circles on ground that does not belong to them, rather than standing firm on their own patrimony. Our enemies scarcely need to fight. They have outwitted us. How many saints are enjoying their celestial allotment? How many have appropriated the territory by faith which is theirs in this administration? One of the great Christian bodies has territorial sovereignty on earth. Most of them are possessed of plots of land down here. But few indeed are standing on celestial soil and defending it from spiritual foes.

We talk of apostate Israel, but, in all their apostasy, they have not utterly lost their bearings. They know where their

allotment is. True, they are foolish to fight for land that Yahweh will give them in due time, but their folly shows that they know His mind concerning them in a minute measure. They are ready to meet every effort which opposes their claim. Woe to the nation which will not concede it! O that the joint allottees of the celestial realms had a tithe of their intelligence and a fraction of their fervor. They would not come into conflict with the Arabs, as the Jews in Palestine, but with far craftier foes in the celestial sphere.

Israel's warfare is with blood and flesh. Their allotment is the land. Our holdings are in heaven. Our strife is with wicked spirits. One of the hardest lessons for us to learn is the fact that we do *not* fight with our fellows. There must be no close conflict, no grappling with men, no wrestling with those within our reach. This negative injunction has never been heartily heeded. Even Protestant princes have not hesitated to use the arm of flesh in forwarding the fight of faith. Saints have seldom worn the sandals of the evangel of peace, in their earthly contacts. The great truth of the conciliation of mankind was not recovered at the Reformation. There was only a blurred vision of Romans three and four, and a refusal to enter the fifth chapter.

Neither is the fight with our own flesh. It is a fatal mistake to seek to subdue the flesh. It is futile to strive against our physical propensities. The disposition of the flesh is death, so let us put it in the place of death. It cannot be subject, so let us cease to expect anything from it, or seek to improve it. The flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. The only successful solution is to starve the flesh, to put it in the place of death, to nail it to the cross. Those who are of Christ crucify the flesh with its passions and lusts. The flesh is not on a par with the spirit. We have power and authority over the flesh, so that we should never condescend to strive as equals. We must condemn it to the ignominious stake.

Much the same is true of the old humanity, which we receive from Adam. If we realize the great truth that we are a new humanity in Christ, and that the old was crucified with Him, we will not disgrace ourselves by entering the lists against the decaying and decrepit humanity to which our bodies still belong but which we should put off, by the power of the spirit, just as we discard garments too worn and filthy for further use. Let there be no conflict with the old humanity. With men we are at peace, even as God is conciliated toward them now. For them our feet are sandaled with the readiness of the evangel of peace, for our feet alone are in contact with the earth. Our very panoply provides for a truce with mankind (Eph.6:15). Only as we mount, by faith, to our celestial allotment, will we wage war.

OUR CELESTIAL STRIFE

As soon as we seek to enjoy our allotment among the celestials by faith we enter a scene of unceasing strife, carried on with skillful strategy and spiritual force. If the marvelous revelations of the previous portion of this epistle have been apprehended, two matters of much moment have emerged. On earth we have no interests which conflict with any man. We have no allotment here to form the basis of a quarrel. Palestine is not for us, hence we have no clashes with the Arabs who claim it. But, just as the dispossessed Palestinian Arabs resent and resist the presence of the Jews, to whom God has promised the land of Palestine, so the celestial powers oppose our appearance on their possessions. Moreover, no world power has been given a mandate over the celestial territory to help us retain our rights. Each one must hold his own ground, and defend the plot which is allotted to him single-handed and alone.

In the coming administration of God's indignation, the Adversary will come down to earth to be a roaring lion to

the remnant of Israel. Why does he single them out for his prey? Because he is well aware that earth's sovereignty, which he has held for more than seven millenniums, has been given to God's Anointed, and that His people Israel will administer His government when He ascends the throne. The same motive impels now the spiritual forces of wickedness among the celestials in their opposition to the ecclesia which, some day, will displace them in their celestial sovereignty. They know far better than the saints what our presence implies. It is a plain intimation that their sovereignty is succumbing to the assaults of Christ. It heralds the hour when their hold on the heavens will cease. They will do their utmost to keep us from the enjoyment of our allotment.

How well they seem to have succeeded! Few, indeed, of the saints even know that they have a celestial allotment to defend. They are like a Jew who has never heard of Palestine. Some deny our title to any celestial allotment. They are like those Jews who prefer the Argentine or some other place to the patrimony of their fathers. A few, very few, in spirit, hold celestial property. Even these are not well equipped, and suffer for lack of armor suited to the conflict. It is to these that we address ourselves. If, by faith, they have acquired the celestial homestead which is presented in the first chapter of this epistle (verses 3-19), then they have also come into the possession of a feud which will cost them many a defeat if they are not prepared for its defense. Do not let the stratagems of the Adversary shift your stand to earth. Do not allow his fiery darts to slip past the shield of faith. Remember, though you have been saved from your sins, and are being saved from sin, you still need salvation in the celestial spheres.

THE ADVERSARY

A good general sends out scouts to get all possible infor-

mation as to his enemy. It is wise that we should be well acquainted with our foes. It is essential that we should recognize our chief adversary. In the future, on the earth, he will resemble a roaring lion. He will openly attack the saints. No one will mistake him then. Not so now. To all appearances he is "an angel of light." His ministers are transfigured as dispensers of righteousness. Let us suppose that some radiant, angelic messenger graced the earth with his presence, teaching men to forsake the wrong and cleave to the right, disclosing marvelous secrets of science for the betterment of mankind, adding to our store of knowledge, harnessing the forces of nature for our use, the patron of education, philanthropy and religion. Suppose he consummated a movement for the federation of mankind, a congress of the nations, the brotherhood of man. Suppose he was able to suppress those vices which mar men's schemes, and bring them to fruition. Let him be their guardian angel, their guiding star. Let him ask no pay for his pains except the appreciation and the worship which his work inspires. On the surface he seems to have no fault but this, the acceptance of divine worship, which belongs to God alone, or to His Anointed. This is a true picture of Satan, the Adversary, the adversary of God and His Christ, and all who worship Him. He it is who seeks to cure humanity's mortal wound apart from the presence of Messiah.

Today he is the great deceiver. He employs a satyr with horns and hoofs, who delights in torturing men and dragging them down into the gutter, to mask his real occupation. Most men imagine that he is the monarch of an imaginary underworld, that he is enthroned in "hell." But from God's Word we know that he never was, nor is, nor shall be there. When death and "hell" are cast into the lake of fire he is already in that dreadful place, not its monarch, but its most miserable victim. In that day Christ alone will

rule throughout the universe. But in this era Satan holds sway in secret on the earth.

It is only by stealth and deception that he holds fast the homage of humanity. If men knew that the serpent of Eden had been transformed into a messenger of light in order to better carry on his early work of weaning men's hearts away from God, if they knew that the angelic glory hid the serpent's heart, would they so blindly do his bidding? Our adversary is the god of this eon. He is worshiped in Christendom as well as among the heathen. Everywhere is found his worship, except among the feeble few who to Christ are true. He it is who blinds the minds of unbelievers, so that the illumination of the evangel of the glory of Christ, Who is the Image of the invisible God, does not irradiate them (2 Cor.4:4).

THE ADVERSARY'S STRATAGEMS

Satan could never blind men to the evangel by torturing them with miseries. That would drive them to Christ as a Refuge from his hands. He has learned far better than that. He can lead them on by filling their vision with a promise of prosperity. He does not gain their allegiance by siding with wrong. By propaganda for justice and peace he finds multitudes to applaud his measures and support his pretensions.

Such is his course with the unbelievers, especially with the self-righteous, church-going religionist. How does he behave toward the saints? Here also the danger lies in his strategy. The heart fails as we see multitudes of Christ's members become Satan's eager instruments for the reformation and moral uplift of mankind. Not only are they involved in sanitary politics and fleshly philanthropies, but the very "gospel" which is preached glides over the blood of Christ to a promise of bread and butter, better clothes, a cleaner and more prosperous career, and a respectable

standing in the community, all of which Satan will gladly give to those who will worship him. Christ's gospel bears no promise of temporal advantage in the world today. Instead, it may mean nakedness and poverty and ignominy. It brought all of these to the great apostle who is the example of its power.

But still more subtle are Satan's schemes to deceive the saints. With ingenious art he misplaces truth and presses the most precious portions of Scripture beyond their proper sphere. This passage will afford a good example. All saints acknowledge the power of the blood of Christ. In *God's* presence the blood is everything. But has it a place in this conflict? Does it avail in the sight of the Adversary? Is the blood our shelter from his arrows, our deliverance from his devices? For our protection in this warfare God has given us a spiritual armor. It consists of truth, righteousness, peace, faith. This is not the place for the blood. If these are lacking, the deepest appreciation of the potency of Christ's sacrificial death will not deliver us from the assaults of the powers of darkness.

This illustration will help to explain why some, who seem to give the blood a place we do not accord it now, fall in line with the Adversary's program and are deceived by his consummate imitations of physical and spiritual endowments. These are all latent in the sacrifice of Christ, but the time for their realization has not yet arrived. These graces are connected with an earthly allotment, not with the celestial holdings which belong to us. They are the Adversary's stratagem, intended to lure the saints from their celestial allotment.

OUR DEFENSIVE ARMOR

To correspond with our weakness, our panoply is composed of five pieces, truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation. These are figured by a girdle, a cuirass, sandals,

a shield, and a helmet. Let us remember that all of this is "in the *Lord*," not "in *Christ*." Our destiny is not at stake. It is altogether a matter of conduct and the present life. We have all of the spiritual graces which make up this armor in Christ. In Him we are righteous and justified. In Him we have peace with God. But this is not in view here. To win in this defense we must know the truth, we must act justly, we must practice peace with our fellow men, we must exercise faith, and then we will enjoy a present salvation from the assaults of the powers of darkness.

GIRDED WITH TRUTH

We need to know but little truth to be saved from sin. We need a thorough realization of God's revelation to be saved from Satan during our present life. Truth is first in this warfare. In these days truth is not only ignored but belittled. Satan's ministers are transfigured as dispensers of righteousness, but they oppose the truth. Without a certain measure of truth we will not even know of our celestial allotment. A mature grasp of God's present plans will give strength and readiness for action. It will give us assurance and steadfastness. Only this will keep us from being pushed from our position. It is the lack of truth which has left the heavenly allotment almost deserted. The saints are thieving Israel's physical and spiritual belongings instead of defending their own. Hence they lack the helmet of salvation.

THE CUIRASS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Righteousness in word and deed is our chief protection from the assaults of the spiritual forces of wickedness. It is figured by a complete covering for the thorax, not only a breastplate, but a backplate as well, so that the vital organs are well encased in a coat of mail. Wrong doing not only incurs the condemnation of men, but the accu-

sation of the spirit world, not to speak of the loss at the dais of Christ. The heavenly allotment cannot be enjoyed by those who act unjustly, and thus leave off this cuirass, and leave themselves open to the attacks of their malignant spirit enemies. It is only as we don this cuirass that we may receive the helmet of salvation from their attacks.

THE SANDALS OF PEACE

This is the most remarkable part of our panoply. Peace is not usually a part of conflict. Sandals are not armor. Yet, even among men, many a war was decided by peace. In World War I the outcome was largely influenced by the fact that Germany did not remain at peace with the United States. A country which is already fully engaged in battle is not fit to fight another enemy. If we engage in strife with mankind we will be unfitted for the fight with our real enemies. Sandals figure our contact with the earth, with humankind. To be saved in this warfare it is of the utmost value to know the truth of the conciliation, and to imitate God in His attitude toward the race.

The sandals of the readiness of the evangel of peace give us the positive side of the apostle's warning that it is not ours to wrestle with blood and flesh. It is a most difficult lesson to learn. There is so much friction with our fellow men; they are so blatant in their enmity to God, that it is difficult to maintain His attitude toward them, and refuse to antagonize the unbeliever. Yet this is essential to our celestial warfare. When this economy ends and the next begins the scenes will all be shifted. Then our celestial foes will be dislodged, and God will change His dealings with men. Peace will be replaced by indignation. Until then, let us not jeopardize our warfare by antagonizing those with whom He is at peace.

THE SHIELD OF FAITH

In ancient warfare two kinds of shields were used. A

small buckler parried the blows in a hand-to-hand conflict. A large shield, called a "door," fended the flying missiles of the enemy. Such a shield is ours, to protect us from the arrows of our enemies. One of the devices of ancient warfare was the use of elephants to dismay the enemy by their onslaught. For this a counter measure was invented. Arrows were fitted with combustibles, lit, and shot into the thick hide of the animals, who became so terror stricken by the blazing darts and maddened by the burning wounds that they stampeded, doing more damage to their own side than to the enemy. Our spirit foes use such fiery arrows to wound and torture us. Only faith can fend us from them. Those engaged in this warfare for long will find their shields studded with the charred stumps of arrows which would have rankled in their flesh if faith had not caught their force and quenched their fire.

To sight and sense men seem to be our enemies, who cause us untold suffering and agony of spirit. It is not so. Faith insists that men are merely the instruments of unseen spirit forces which impel them, of which they are not aware. Faith refuses to fight with men because it believes and receives the conciliation. No part of our faith is more helpful in defeating the fiery shafts of our foes than this great truth.

We have insisted, and rightly so, that this passage does not affect our position in Christ, but deals with our conduct in the Lord. Our behavior, however, is always dependent on what is ours by faith. If we had no celestial allotment we would have no heavenly conflict. With the large shield of faith we take refuge behind that which is ours in Christ, apart from our own doings. One blazing arrow may be the certainty that our sins and offenses are such that we have no right or title to any allotment on earth or in the heavens. Only faith in God's declarations can quench this rankling insinuation.

RECEIVING THE HELMET OF SALVATION

Do not *take* the helmet of salvation! We should take the panoply and the shield, but it is only after we have taken the rest that we may wear the helmet. The girdle and the cuirass must be put on. The shield must be held aloft. Only then, and not till then, may we *receive* the helmet, which is salvation. It is God's award to those who are girded with truth and protected by righteousness, and shod with peace, and sheltered by faith. Without these, our heads must be bared to the assaults of our adversaries. With them we wear the helmet which proclaims us invulnerable.

This helmet is not salvation from our sins or ourselves, but from the spiritual forces of wickedness among the celestials. If all this were needed to save us from sin, would anyone be saved? This salvation is confined to our contacts with unseen spirit forces. It is limited to the defense of our celestial allotment. It is deliverance from the mighty powers of darkness which seek to rob us of the enjoyment of our allotment among the celestials. Let us remember that this is the Godward aspect of the secret. It does not deal with our relationship to Christ as members of His body, or our place in the new humanity. Those are the Christward and manward aspects of the secret. Here we have a special salvation from the malignant world of celestial spirits.

OUR OFFENSIVE WEAPON

Only as thus accoutered are we ready to wage offensive warfare. The sword, like the helmet, is to be *received*, not taken. Only those should handle it who are measurably qualified. With God's declarations we can rout all our foes who trespass on our allotment. Israel, even under Solomon, never conquered all the land God gave to Abraham. The saints today hold hardly any of the ground which is theirs according to God's Word. There is no other means

of regaining our lost heritage. The first chapter of Ephesians is the unbroken sword which will clear our allotment of all intruders.

This sword is not for saints or sinners, but for spirits. Let us not use it to cut and slash our fellow believers. Let us not wage war against our fellow men. Our enemies gain a great victory when they introduce sedition into the citadel of the saints. They acquire a vast advantage when we turn its edge against our fellow men. It is utterly devastating to take the phrase "the sword of the spirit" away from its context and use God's Word as a blade to destroy all and sundry. Its cutting and killing power is only for those whom God accounts His enemies.

THE CELESTIAL WARFARE

To sum up, our warfare is not with blood and flesh, but with the sovereignties, with the authorities, with the world-mights of this darkness, with the spiritual forces of wickedness among the celestials (Eph.6:12). The celestial allotment (Eph.1:3,11) which characterizes the present secret administration is still in the hands of opposing spiritual forces, who will not be finally dislodged until the day of deliverance. These enemies of ours are active in opposing every effort of faith to grasp its patrimony and maintain its heavenly stand. Conduct conforming to this truth, any measure of attaining to the out-resurrection, as the apostle puts it in Philippians, will meet sore opposition from sinister spirit forces. To withstand them we are provided with the panoply, the shield and the sword. So may we stand.

Our conduct toward these dark spirit powers should be the opposite to that of our behavior toward our fellow men. There is a sword for the former, an olive branch for the latter. Men may be used by these spirit forces to antagonize us, but let us always look beyond the human agents. The

sword is not for them. If we wish to be saved from these foes let us furnish our armory with the girdle of truth, the cuirass of righteousness, the sandals of peace, and God will furnish the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit. Let us then stand, like Shammah (2 Sam.23:11,12) one of David's mighties, with all our armor on, with shield and sword in hand, and defend our celestial fields from the dark spirit powers which seek to rob us of the enjoyment of our heavenly lot.

A. E. Knoch

2 Corinthians 10:4-6

⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but powerful to God toward the pulling down of bulwarks; ⁵ pulling down reckonings and every height elevating^o itself against the knowledge of God, and leading into captivity every apprehension [MIND-effect] into the listening of Christ, ⁶ and having all in readiness to avenge every disregarding, whenever =your listening may be completed.

In accord with Romans 5:19 and Philippians 2:8 "the listening of Christ" is His listening unto the death of the cross. It is "the evangel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor.4:4). We are to be listening to His listening and as we complete our listening, we are made ready to avenge every disregarding of Christ's listening, that is, of every disregarding of "our evangel" (2 Cor.4:3).

Let us, then, be listening to the listening of Christ in His suffering and death and to what it accomplishes. Such bulwarks as the teaching of a "limited atonement" and the idea of an "eternal hell" are pulled down by the evangel of Christ's love, "judging this, that if One dies for the sake of all [in His listening to the instructions of His God and Father unto the death of the cross], *consequently* all die [as to what they are in Adam]" (2 Cor.5:14; Rom.5:12-19). "For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified" (1 Cor.15:22).

D.H.H.