

Enemies of God's People



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Quotations from Scripture are generally taken from the King James or J N Darby translations. We will indicate in the text or a footnote if an article uses another translation.

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EDITORIAL

We start this issue with a striking piece of writing. J T Mawson, an outstanding evangelist and teacher in the early 20th century, began his book *How to Overcome* with a foreword entitled ‘The Imprisoned Eagle’. The extract below (slightly adapted) is a fitting introduction to our subject: the enemies of God’s people.

‘I saw a pathetic sight in Scotland. It was a great eagle in a massive cage. The sun shining brilliantly in the heavens seemed to be calling to it to rise from the earth and rejoice in its natural element, and the royal bird in response to the call fixed its eye on the sun and spread its mighty wings and stooped for flight, and then, becoming conscious of the iron bars that held it prisoner, it dropped its wings and lowered its head in apparent disappointment and shame. Had I been an artist and had I wished to paint a picture of defeat, that great bird would have been my model. And yet it had the *desire* for liberty — that was clear in the flashing eye, and it had *power* for liberty — that was clear in the outstretched pinions; it was the cage that held it prisoner in spite of its desire and in spite of the power.

The captive bird became a parable for me. It spoke to me of Christians who have the *desire* for the things above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God (Col. 3:1). These things are their own, for they have been freely given them of God, and the divine nature is in them, or they would not be Christians at all. They have the *power* also to rise up in thought and affection to where their true life is, for the Holy Spirit dwells in them, and yet as to the practical enjoyment of these things they know nothing, for they are held as prisoners to the earth. The snares with which the devil enticed them have become a cage in which he holds them, and they despair of ever feeling the joy of Christian liberty again. Is there no way of victory? Will the captive never become an overcomer? Yes, there is hope, for the Lord is gracious, and there is a way of victory for those who feel their bondage.’

Editors

THE PHILISTINES

Introduction

In this article, the purpose is to provide an outline of the origins and history of the Philistines in relation to the people of God. From the Old Testament accounts, we can draw lessons for ourselves as Christians today — to enable us to recognise ‘present-day Philistines’ and, more importantly, judge ourselves and our ways. We will not explore the prophetic future of the nation foretold in Ezekiel and other prophetic writings.

Origins

Philistim and Caphtorim were both descended from Ham (Gen.10:6–14). They are associated with Egypt, but descendants of both came to dwell in the south-west part of what became known as Canaan. In Genesis 21:32, we read of the ‘*land of the Philistines*’, which is used for the same area thereafter in the Old Testament.

At once we see a difference between the Philistines and the people of God. Abraham came to dwell in the land as a pilgrim and stranger — and such he continued to be although God promised the land to him and his descendants (later known as Israel). After captivity in Egypt, the children of Israel were brought back to the land by means of redemption (the Passover sacrifice in Egypt) and deliverance (at the Red Sea). The Philistines knew nothing of redemption or deliverance, but came into the land by the short and easy ‘*way of the sea*’ from Egypt. They also knew nothing of crossing the Jordan.¹

Occupying the Land

Israel, under Joshua’s leadership, was told to take possession of the land of Canaan, but they did not conquer it completely. Thus, part continued to be occupied by the Philistines (Josh. 13:2; Jdg. 3:3). The faithful Shamgar fought against and defeated

¹ As the Jordan speaks of identification with Christ in His death, we can say that the Philistines speak of those who take a Christian position but know nothing of Christ (Eds.).

600 Philistines (Jdg. 3:31), but this was not a conclusive victory because it was the effort of one man and did not represent taking possession by the nation as a whole.

The historical summary which follows will show the effects of the occupation by the Philistines of part of the land promised to Abraham and his heirs. ‘Enemy’ is a strong word but such were the Philistines throughout — not simply an inconvenience. We should never allow what is contrary to God’s revealed word to continue among the people of God.

Abraham and Isaac

Abraham and Isaac had both, at different times, gone down to ‘Abimelech king of the Philistines’ (e.g. Gen. 20 and 26). They were not blameless towards Abimelech, but the actions of the Philistines reveal something of the reasons for naming them as ‘enemies’ of God’s people. Genesis 26:14–22 tell us:

- Abraham had dug wells in Philistine country;
- The Philistines had filled them with earth;
- Isaac dug them out again;
- Isaac dug further wells, and the Philistines contended for them.

In the scriptures, water speaks of the word of God. It was essential for men and their flocks and herds to have sufficient supplies of water in order to maintain life. To fill a well with earth is destructive, and potentially life-threatening. Spiritual parallels between water for day-to-day living and water for the spiritual life are clear, and the incident above typifies attempts to deprive the people of God of His word. Philistines would prevent the enjoyment of God’s word, filling the space with ‘earthly matters’, perhaps with arguments to distract and discourage God’s people.

Samson

Because of their sin, God delivered the children of Israel into the hands of the Philistines for 40 years (Jdg. 13:1)! This was longer

than any previous nation had been allowed to rule over them (for example Moab, Canaan, Midian and Ammon). At the end of that time, it pleased God to use a single man, Samson, to *'begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines'* (Jdg. 13:5). Samson was to be a Nazarite. He did, indeed, make a start, but his limitations as a man soon showed themselves. Nevertheless, God used him so that *'the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life'* (Jdg. 16:30).

Perhaps the use of one man only, without the association of the nation, can be understood when we consider some words spoken to Samson by the men of Judah: *'Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over us? What is this that thou hast done unto us?'* (Jdg. 15:11). They had completely accepted the ascendancy of the Philistines over them — it was the situation, so why cause trouble? We must take these words and the attitude of those who spoke them as a solemn warning for ourselves. How easy it is to make excuses for accepting unscriptural principles, whether in assembly matters or in individual behaviour, because that is 'how it is these days'. Samson would not accept that answer, and nor should we if we have a desire to be pleasing to God.

Israel after Samson

In the days of Samuel, Israel went out to battle against the Philistines but the battle did not go well for Israel. In an attempt to bring God into things in a way He had not directed them, they carried the ark of the covenant into the battle. The Philistines were much afraid, and acknowledged the greatness of God, but these feelings and thoughts spurred them on to greater endeavour. Sadly, Israel was defeated and lost 30,000 men, and the ark of God was taken by the Philistines. The Philistines were idolaters and could not deal with the results of their presumption in capturing the ark of God. Its presence destroyed their idol, Dagon, and God's anger at their actions led Him immediately to bring judgment by way of widespread death and sickness (1 Sam. 5 and 6).

As a result of these sad events, and their sins and failures, Israel

was without the ark of the covenant for some 20 years: *‘we enquired not at it in the days of Saul’* (1 Chr. 13:3). The story of the return of the ark by the Philistines, the failures and idolatry of Israel and Samuel’s call to Israel to return to God and serve Him is most instructive but outside the scope of the present article. It was under King David, some 20 years later, that the ark was truly recovered — under the hand of God and according to God’s means which David had to learn.

Before David, in the time of King Saul, spoilers came out of the Philistine camp at a time when Israel was seriously short of weaponry (1 Sam. 13). There was no smith in Israel, and it was customary for the Israelites to go down to the Philistines to have their implements sharpened: *‘there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan’* (1 Sam. 13:22). It may be that the Philistines had brought this situation about, or it may be only that they benefited from it (1 Sam. 13:19). The real lesson for us is that Israel depended for their resources on an enemy. One has written: ‘If we depend on the world to furnish our weapons, we will find ourselves resourceless for combating it. Our weapon is the word. How can we use it against the world, if we consent to give the world the right to teach In this way the world has the means in its hands to bring us into bondage, and it will not leave us any portion of this word except that which poses no threat to itself.’²

David — ‘Is there not a cause?’

The enmity of the Philistines continued during the time of the kings, and until David had scored decisive victories. Before David was king, but after he was anointed, the massed armies of the Philistines assembled against the armies of Israel under Saul. He and Israel could not begin to know how to deal with this apparently superior fighting force. What they saw was the prospect of a decisive battle, in which they were by no means sure of victory. Indeed, who could take on the mighty giant Go-

² H L Rossier, *Meditations on The First Book of Samuel*.

liath? None looked to God for an answer, nor did they recognise His answer in David. For David, as God's anointed king, the threat from Goliath was a defiance of the living God and His armies (1 Sam. 17:26b, 45). As such, it could not be allowed to stand.

The story of David's fight against Goliath and his victory is so well known we will not go into detail here. It is sufficient to say that it depicts, in a type, an even greater victory when One, made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, *'destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage'* (Heb. 2:14b–15). *'When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men'* (Eph. 4:8, from Ps. 68:18). At the same time, these scriptures go far beyond what is typified by 1 Samuel 17, because the single action of a man, however much it honoured God, can never convey all the Lord Jesus has done and the victory He has won.

Israel continued at war with the Philistines, who caused the death of Saul and Jonathan. At times, it appeared that the Philistine king Achish was helpful to David. However, David had to be brought to realise what, sadly, Achish and his men realised before he did, that it was untenable for him to fight with the Philistines against King Saul — who under God still occupied the throne of Israel (1 Sam. 29). What a lesson for Christians today! Could we get into a position where we are on the world's side against the people of God? Perhaps we need to realise more clearly how carelessness in association with others can bring this about.

David's Mighty Men

Later in David's life, the Goliath battle had to be repeated four times (see 2 Sam. 21:15–22). The other sons of the giant appear: Goliath's four brothers. These all have to fall by the hand of David and his servants but, perhaps, these enemies are not all they appear at first sight. They are all of terrifying appearance, but one has a 'new sword' and another has a spear but no sword.

Goliath's sword had been taken by David! These 'sons of the giant' are on the losing side! David's faithful men are assured of victory as they take up the challenge to stand for him in his battles, and their valour is recorded for ever in the word.

The true David is never 'faint', nor can His light be 'quenched'; He has fully secured a complete victory by His cross. But David's servants show us how each of those who would be true must stand for Christ. The enemy seeks ever and again to destroy, in the sense of discrediting, Christ's work and blotting it out of remembrance. He cannot, and for this we thank God, affect by one iota anything that He has done, but we have to stand and defend the name of Christ, our Saviour.

The further examples of David's 'mighty men' in 2 Samuel 23 are all instructive. Some of those mentioned have what appear to be larger roles assigned to them than others. Yet Scripture explicitly records, in verse 11, what might have been overlooked as an insignificant affair — certainly something not as exciting as killing a giant or hundreds of Philistines at one time. The Holy Spirit includes this incident for a purpose. There was a piece of ground full of lentils, and Shammah stood in the middle of it and defended it. Why make an issue of a little patch of lentils, a very humble kind of food? For many important reasons, including:

- It was not only a matter of lentils, but of the God-given ground (*'The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me'*: Lev. 25:23);
- Lentils were the food of the people (however lowly);
- The Philistines always wanted to destroy sustenance (see Abraham and Isaac, above);
- They would not be satisfied with a little 'piece of ground' but, having established a base, would want more of the land given by God to Israel.

Thus, the story of Shammah should encourage us to stand firm for what we possess in Christ, and not to let the enemy spoil our enjoyment of what He has given us at such cost to Himself.

After David

David *'smote the Philistines, and subdued them'* (2 Sam. 8:1). Although subdued, it does not appear that they were ever made completely subject to Israel. Solomon reigned as far as the borders of Egypt and the land of the Philistines (e.g. 1 Ki. 4:21). However, it does appear that David and his men secured a cessation of warfare.

A subsequent king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, walked in the ways of David, his father, and fear fell on all the nations round about. Some of the Philistines brought him gifts (2 Chr. 17:11). However, in the reign of his son, Jehoram, the Philistines again came to Judah, despoiled the king's house and took away all but one of his family (2 Chr. 21:16–17). Subsequently, Uzziah had some success against them because *'God helped him'* but, later, *'the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz'* so that the Philistines again invaded the south and, indeed, dwelt there (2 Chr. 26:7; 28:18–19).

In view of the actions of Ahaz, it is good to read that Hezekiah (son of Ahaz) *'smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza, and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city'* (2 Ki. 18:8). That is probably the last historical reference to the Philistines. This final successful action of Hezekiah in driving the Philistines back to their own place is significant in itself. Doubtless, it was made possible because Hezekiah *'did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did'* (2 Ki. 18:3).

Summary

According to *Chambers Dictionary*, a Philistine is 'a person of material outlook, indifferent to culture'. Such a definition will not suffice spiritually. From the origins of the Philistines and the histories given in the scriptures identified above, we have established facts to enable us to draw certain conclusions and thus identify lessons for the present day:

- Philistines represent that which has come in among the

people of God, but which does not belong — that which owes nothing to deliverance or redemption, and everything to assumption of a place to which it has no title.

- Philistine activities include:
 - filling the minds of the saints with ‘earth’, that is earthly interests and concerns to discourage their dependence on the word of God;
 - raising contentions;
 - trying to entangle the saints in earthly and worldly issues, so as to lose their usefulness (loss of ‘Nazariteship’ and powerlessness in service);
 - trying to confuse the saints about what is of God and what is of the world;
 - inducing reliance on worldly weapons for Christian warfare.
- David and his mighty men teach us the need to:
 - exercise constant vigilance;
 - defend what we have taken possession of;
 - fight, for the Lord’s honour, the battles of our day (defeat the sons of the giant).

At the risk of closing on a negative note, a warning is needed today as never before concerning Philistine activities. The Philistines have succeeded in taking possession and occupying so much ground in people’s spiritual and temporal lives. Likewise, Christendom has adopted worldly principles in its ways of arranging ‘church services’. Those who resist are made out to be ‘odd’ or ‘extreme’.

Scripture has not changed. It leads us to expect our gatherings to be marked by a quiet waiting in the Lord’s presence for the Holy Spirit to occupy us with Him, in order that one or another brother might take audible part (while all take silent part). It teaches us that a Christian’s home should be like a Bethany, where the Lord is welcome and is the object of the service of

those within. It informs our behaviour to one another and to men in general. Thus, we need each to challenge ourselves as to how far we are fulfilling what the scriptures teach, or whether we are allowing the worldly and unregenerate influences around us to dictate our life and practice.

Hugh Clark

AMALEK IN REPHIDIM

Exodus 16 and 17 deal with three incidents: God's provision of manna from heaven; His provision of water out of a rock; and Israel's conflict with Amalek. Edward Dennett offers the following comments on the third of them.

The connection of the incidents is most instructive as illustrating the ways and the truth of God: in the first, the manna is Christ come down from heaven; in the second, the smitten rock is Christ crucified and the living water the Holy Ghost; and now, in the third, together with the reception of the Spirit comes conflict. It must be so, for '*the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would*' (Gal. 5:17). Hence the order of these typical events.

What then is symbolised by Amalek? It is often stated that it is the flesh; but this is only part of the truth. As to Amalek, his real character is readily apprehended from his origin (see Gen. 36:12). But the point to be discerned in Exodus 17 is that Amalek sets himself in open antagonism to the people of God, and seeks to hinder their progress and even to destroy them from off the face of the earth. It is therefore the power of Satan — acting through the flesh it may be — that thus challenges the onward march of the children of Israel. And the subtlety of Satan in the time chosen for the attack is plainly apparent. It was just after the people had sinned, at a time, therefore, when the enemy might have supposed that they were under the displeasure of God. This

is ever his method. But if God be for His people, He will suffer no foe to accomplish their destruction. The people indeed if left to themselves might easily have been scattered, but He who had brought them through the waters of the Red Sea will not now leave them to perish. The Lord was their banner, and thus their defence was sure.

Let us then notice how the defeat of Amalek was accomplished (Ex. 17:8–13). First, we find that Joshua, at the commandment of Moses, places himself at the head of chosen men for the battle. Joshua represents Christ, in the energy of the Spirit, leading His redeemed to the conflict. What a consolation! If Satan marshals his forces to assail the Lord's people, Christ, on the other hand, leads out His chosen men to meet the foe. The battle therefore is the Lord's. This is illustrated throughout the history of Israel, and it is as true in principle of the conflicts of believers of this dispensation. This, if apprehended, will calm our minds in the presence of the sorest difficulties. It will help us to cease from relying upon man, and to count upon the Lord. It will enable us to estimate at their proper value the restless activity and the schemes of men, and to seek deliverance solely from the Lord as the leader of His people. In a word, we should remember that there can be no successful defence offered to our foes save in the power of the Spirit of God.

There is yet another thing. If Joshua leads his warriors in the plain, Moses, with Aaron and Hur, goes up to the top of the hill, and the fight below depends upon the uplifting of the hands of Moses above. Moses, as thus seen, is a figure of Christ above in the value of His intercession. While He leads His people in the power of the Spirit below, He maintains their cause by His intercession in the presence of God and secures for them mercy and grace. They have no strength for conflict apart from His priestly intercession, and the energy of the Spirit as leading them onward is in relation to this intercession. Paul indicates this truth when he says: *'It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also*

*maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword [or, we may add, Amalek]? ... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us' (Rom. 8:34–37). The Lord Himself taught His disciples the connection between His work above and the Spirit's action in them below when He said: 'If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you' (John 16:7). Hence, too, He terms the Holy Ghost 'another Comforter' (John 14:16) and John applies to our blessed Lord the same title (that is, 'Advocate', but really the same Greek word *Paraclete*: 1 John 2:1).*

But no one man could be a perfect type of Christ. The hands of Moses were heavy, so they were sustained by Aaron and Hur. This, however, only brings out more fully the truth of the intercession of Christ. Aaron, although not yet formally set apart, represents the priesthood, and Hur, if the significance of the name may guide us, typifies light or purity. Together with Moses, therefore, it presents the priestly intercession of Christ maintained in holiness before God, and, hence, an intercession which is ever effectual and prevailing since it is based upon all that Christ is and has done. The lesson should be well observed. The battle below depended not upon the strength of the warriors, nor even upon the Holy Spirit, but upon the enduring and efficacious intercession of Christ. When Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. Hence the necessity of dependence. Apart from it, we may be ready for the conflict and the cause may be a just one, but our failure will be sure and inevitable. With it, having Christ on high on our behalf and Christ in the energy of the Spirit as our leader, when the wicked, even our enemies and our foes, come against us, they will stumble and fall (Ps. 27:2). Then no foe can stand before the Lord's people.

Amalek was thus discomfited with the edge of the sword. But this victory, the revelation of the source of their strength and the unchanging character of the enemy were not to be forgotten.

They were to be recorded as a memorial (Ex. 17:14–16). Two things were combined in this memorial: the record of their deliverance from Amalek, and the pledge of his final overthrow. Every display of the Lord's power on behalf of His people bears this double character. If He step in and vindicate them from the assaults of their enemies, He, by that same act, assures them of His continual protection and care. Accordingly, every interposition of His between them and their foes should be rehearsed in their ears and written on their hearts, both as the memorial of the past and as the guarantee of His immutable defence. Hence when the Psalmist celebrates a past deliverance, he exclaims: *'Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident'* (Ps. 27:3).

In the same confidence Moses built an altar. By it he gratefully owned the divine hand and expressed that the praise of the victory belonged to the Lord. However, it is here that so many fail. The Lord gives help and deliverance, but they forget to build their altars. Driven into the Lord's presence in their straits, they too often neglect to praise Him when relieved from their pressure. Not so with Moses. By building the altar he declared before the whole of Israel: it is the Lord who has fought for us and secured the victory. This is proclaimed by the title he affixed to it: 'The Lord our banner' — He therefore it was who led our hosts, and He it is who will lead our hosts; for His controversy with Amalek will never cease.

As long as the Lord has a people on the earth, Satan will seek to overthrow them. While we need to remember this, with all the prospect of conflict it involves, our hearts will be confident if we can but grasp in power the truth of 'The Lord our banner'. The battle is the Lord's, we fight under His colours, and hence — whatever the stubborn persistence of the foe — the victory is assured.

Edward Dennett

SEVEN ENEMIES OF GOD'S PEOPLE

God made the various enemies inhabiting Canaan known to His people Israel when they were about to cross the Jordan and enter the land (Josh. 3:10). This indicates that God wants His people to know:

1. the enemies they are about to face;
2. the essential characteristics of those enemies so that they can resist them; and
3. the means of resisting their enemies — Christ's death (the Jordan) — and apply it to their lives in a practical way with the faith that Christ is on their side.

This reminds us of two verses in the New Testament: *'that we might not have Satan get an advantage against us, for we are not ignorant of his thoughts'* (2 Cor. 2:11), and *'Resist the devil, and he will flee from you'* (Jas. 4:7). Satan is *the* enemy behind all other enemies. He is not scared by us, but he will flee from us because Christ, the victor, is on our side. However, in order for this to happen we must remain close to Christ.

In Deuteronomy 7:1 and Joshua 3:10, God named the seven nations of the land that would be Israel's enemies there. We do not always find the same names in other lists of their enemies, but invariably we find seven. This seems to be an indication of the complete and utter enmity of these nations against God and His people.

The seven nations we are considering are symbolic of the enemies of the heavenly people of God. Our enemies are not flesh and blood but *'the universal lords of this darkness, ... spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies'* (Eph. 6:12). These enemies are Satan and his angels — demons — and other spiritual beings who want to rob us of all our heavenly blessings. They often use men to oppose us, but we need to remember we are not really fighting men, but Satan.

It is not always possible to say that the meanings of names of persons, towns or nations give a direct indication of their spiritual symbolism. Caution has to be exercised especially in cases where the meanings are not clear. Yet we know that God has not given these names — or allowed them to be used — in a haphazard way. When names are stated in the Bible we may assume they are of significance, so I would like to trace briefly the meanings of the names of these seven nations.

Canaanites: This name can be translated ‘merchants’ hinting at a willingness to bargain or compromise, which is what merchants do when trading. A Canaanite was someone who bent down to display his goods on the ground and so, in a figurative sense, was earth-bound. From a spiritual point of view, Canaanites try to bring Christians back to earth so that they are ready to compromise by seeking fulfilment here. Satan uses such people to hinder us from taking practical possession of heavenly things. He wants us to make false compromises in our lives and to concentrate on career, wealth, family and hobbies: *‘for many walk ... whose god is the belly ... who mind earthly things ... our commonwealth has its existence in the heavens’* (Phil. 3:18–20).

Hittites: The translation of this people’s name means ‘terror’, ‘fear’ or ‘fright’. Satan wants to make us afraid to conquer the heavenlies in a practical way. He does everything he can to make us back off in the fight against him and his angels. For this purpose he appears as a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8), intending to scare us and rob us of the energy to follow Christ and make time in our lives for heavenly blessings.

Hivites: Hivite means ‘village dweller’ or ‘impersonator of life’. Are not these enemies who pretend to have, and impart, life, whereas in reality they are false professors and enemies of God? They not only pretend but seek to make us believe they are benign. If we are deceived they will lead us away from what God intends for us. In reality they want us to settle in the ‘villages’ of this earth rather than take possession of the heavenlies. James speaks of them as those who profess faith but not its works (Jas. 2:14).

Perizzites: Some think this name means ‘squatters’, people with rights of occupation. As we read of them in connection with giants (Josh. 17:15), the Perizzites personify Satan’s intention to seize power over the lives of Christians and distract them from obedience to Christ (compare 2 Cor. 10:4–5). Others prefer the meaning ‘inhabitants of the open country’, referring to those who live in scattered settlements and do not want to cultivate the land. In this sense, the Perrizites are a picture of Satan acting in such a way as to distract us from taking our place in the heavenlies in an orderly (cultivated) way. Satan wants us to become erratic and unstable in our lives (compare 1 Thess. 5:14 and 1 Cor. 14:40) so that God’s Spirit is hindered from guiding us through the everyday circumstances of our life.

Girgashites: Some take this name to mean ‘welling up of dark waters’; others translate it ‘muddy or clayey ground’. Either way, it is Satan who wants us to be occupied with the filth of this world and to be associated with it. We then become unsuitable for heavenly things and the presence of God. He does everything he can to get us soiled by this world. But we are told: *‘withdraw from iniquity’* (2 Tim. 2:19); and *‘every one that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure’* (1 John 3:3).

Amorites: This name is connected with ‘narrator’, ‘orator’, ‘someone who makes himself high’ or ‘mountain dweller’. In relation to the first two meanings, Satan is a great orator. With his lies, he can talk and divert Christians from the truth. He would also like us to indulge in idle talk or otherwise wear us down with the idle talk of others. Paul writes of evil behaviour: *‘let it not be even named among you, as it becomes saints; and filthiness and foolish talking, or jesting, which are not convenient; but rather thanksgiving’* (Eph. 5:3–4). In relation to the second two meanings, Satan desires to exalt himself (compare Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28) and to appear great in order to inspire fear and to impress us. However, we should rather be impressed by the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).

Jebusites: We may associate this name with the idea of being ‘trampled down’ or ‘defeated’ or with the act of ‘trampling

down'. The Jebusites are a picture of Satan who was defeated long ago but who still tries his utmost to trample down others. We have to be on the alert not to be intimidated by him so that we let him 'trample us down', so to speak, from the heavenlies. He has the power of death (Heb. 2:14) and, although a defeated enemy even today, will soon be trampled or bruised under our feet (Rom. 16:20).

In Joshua 9:1 the Gergashites are not named. Are we surprised? Perhaps after a few failed attempts Satan changes tack and no longer comes as one who visibly seeks to defile us as his enmity would be far too obvious and we would fend him off immediately. Instead, he comes like the Gibeonites, pretending to be 'Christian' and in need, while in reality he is an enemy of God's people. Satan likes to come in the form of an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14) but let us not be deceived; he is the very epitome of darkness.

Christ is stronger!

Seven enemies — the cumulative and unified power of the satanic enemy. However, we can remind ourselves that Christ has 'spoiled principalities and authorities', that is, He has disarmed them completely (compare Col. 2:15) so that they have no power over us when we commit ourselves to the victor of Golgotha. The Lord is stronger than all His enemies put together.

Manuel Seibel

THE WORD OF GOD AND THE CHRISTIAN'S ENEMIES

The three main enemies of the believer (and, actually, of man in general) — the devil, the flesh and the world — will always try to hinder any exercise in a person that may be for his or her spiritual benefit. It should not surprise us to see these enemies active when the question of receiving God's word is concerned. In the opening parable in Matthew 13 our Lord makes this quite clear.

The Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:1–23)

In this parable the Lord Jesus is seen in His character as the sower. He continues this service from heaven through His servants. The seed is the word of God (Luke 8:11; Mark 4:14). When hearing the word the listener is personally responsible for what he has heard. In each of the cases considered, the attitude and reaction to the word received is emphasised.

The Lord describes four different types of soil which typify different kinds of human heart. As the reception of the word of God is different in each case, there are different influences active in trying to prevent any fruit in the heart.

The Hard-hearted Hearer and the Devil

The first person hears the word, but his heart is like hard ground, like a path along which many people have walked. This speaks of the natural hardness and unbelief of the human heart. Diverse influences such as information overload, media, leisure time activities, hobbies, business and even religious preconceptions have this result: a person does not understand the word — *‘every one who hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it’* (v. 19). This is not a reference to mere intellectual understanding but an understanding of the heart. The hearer does not want to understand because what is missing is *‘an honest and good heart’* (Luke 8:15).

The people of Israel, particularly their leaders, had this kind of heart during the time the Lord was on earth. But it also speaks of the heart of a sinner who does not want to receive the gospel message. Sad to say, an application to a believer’s heart is also possible as there may be areas in his life where he is no longer willing to listen to the Lord’s teaching. The reason for this may be religious tradition or increasing worldliness. Spiritual decline among believers is not so much a result of a lack of knowledge as a lack of obedience to the word of God.

If we ask ourselves which of the enemies of the believer (or man in general) is active in this case it is obvious that it is the

devil, seen in the birds of the parable: *'the wicked one comes and catches away what was sown in his heart: this is he that is sown by the wayside.'* (v. 19); *'But those by the wayside are those who hear; then comes the devil and takes away the word from their heart that they may not believe and be saved'* (Luke 8:12). If the heart of man — even the heart of a believer — is not willing to obey the word of God, Satan will be quick to take away from the heart any possible impression that may be left. Among other things, he has a whole entertainment industry at his disposal.

The Shallow-hearted Hearer and the Flesh

In this case the seed springs up: the word of God is received with joy (v. 20). Here, however, we have the natural heart at its best. Natural feelings and intellect may receive the word with joy, but this is only the activity of the flesh. The word cannot take root in such a heart because it does not realise the seriousness of the message: a seriousness that does not result in joy as a first reaction but just the opposite for *'repentance to salvation'* (2 Cor. 7:10) comes before *'the joy of thy salvation'* (Ps. 51:2–12). People falling within this second category may be very religious, accepting the word in an outward fashion, but they lack any root and the conscience is not touched. There is no real life.

As believers, we may also have only a very limited sense of what sin means in the eyes of God. Joy is certainly a main feature of a Christian's life. However, it is not a carnal kind of joy but a joy *'in the Lord'* (Phil. 4:4) and a *'joy of the Holy Spirit'* (1 Thess. 1:6). If the profession is tested (the sun meaning tribulation and persecution) it will become obvious what is real and what is not. Those on rocky ground who received the word immediately are those who are offended immediately (Matt. 13:5, 20, 21).

The Half-hearted Hearer and the World

Here we have the seed sown among thorns which choke the growth of the good seed. This third enemy is the world. If our hearts are filled with the world there is no room for spiritual

growth and fruit bearing. The influences mentioned here that choke the word are the *'anxious care of this life'*, *'the deceit of riches'* (v. 22) and the *'pleasures of life'* (Luke 8:14).

In this case even more than in the previous one we see that there is an application to believers. What fills my heart — the world or Christ? The *'anxious care of this life'* does not mean the care we take to fulfil our duties in this life or even the general sorrows that accompany living here (in fact, this is very often the reason people turn to God), but the desires of life: the *'anxious care'* not to miss anything life has to offer.

The Honest Hearer and the Spirit of God

The fourth case illustrates the honest and good heart that really receives the word and in which the Spirit of God can bring about fruit for God: *'But he that is sown upon the good ground — this is he who hears and understands the word, who bears fruit also'* (v. 23).

The fruit is described in different ways in the gospels:

- In Matthew, where the responsibility of man is emphasised, the fruit is decreasing: *'others fell upon the good ground, and produced fruit, one a hundred, one sixty, and one thirty'* (Matt. 13:8);
- In Mark, where the perfect servant sows the seed, the fruit is increasing: *'And another fell into the good ground, and yielded fruit, growing up and increasing; and bore, one thirty, and one sixty, and one a hundred'* (Mark 4:8);
- In Luke, where the soil of the honest heart is emphasised, the fruit is constant: *'and other fell into the good ground, and having sprung up bore fruit a hundredfold ... But that in the good ground, these are they who in an honest and good heart, having heard the word keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience'* (Luke 8:8, 15).

Conclusion

There are numerous illustrations of these different hearts in the Bible:

- The hard-ground type may be seen primarily in the Pharisees, scribes and lawyers in the gospels;
- The shallow-ground type are, for example, those that followed the Lord for a time and then left Him (as mentioned in John 6:66);
- The thorny-ground type is clearly to be seen in the rich young ruler (Matt. 19);
- The good-ground type is seen in the gospels in people such as the disciples, ‘the sinners and publicans’ and Nicodemus.

And where do you and I fit into this picture?

Michael Vogelsang

THE DEVIL AND THE BELIEVER

In considering the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, the previous article has discussed the devil’s interest in snatching away the impact of God’s word on a person’s heart. This article will use the second parable in the chapter to warn us of the character of God’s enemy — and the greatest enemy of every believer — Satan, his tactics and the need to be vigilant against his attacks.

Matthew 13:24–30, as interpreted by the Lord in verses 36 to 43, describes the history of the kingdom of heaven (which, for present purposes, it is sufficient to summarise as Christendom — that is, the combined company of those who are truly the Lord’s plus those who merely profess to know Him) from the time of the Lord’s ministry to ‘*the completion of the age*’ (v. 40). However, verses 24 to 26 also describe activities which are taking place continually throughout the history of the kingdom, including the present time.

Verse 24 begins by stating that the Lord (the sower of v. 37) is establishing His children (the good seed of v. 38) to bear fruit for him in the world (the field, again of v. 38). But the next verse informs us that the Lord has his ‘enemy’ who is the devil (v. 39). Sadly, some Christians contend that Satan does not exist and that the references to him in the Bible are metaphors for some general force of evil in the world. This is a serious error for two reasons. First, it is simply wrong: the Bible ascribes characteristics of a living, thinking and functioning being to Satan, such as moving (e.g. Job 1:7), seeing (e.g. 1 Pet. 5:8), speaking (e.g. Matt. 4:3–10), thinking (e.g. Satan’s reasoning in Job 1:9–11) and feeling (e.g. Satan’s lusts in John 8:44). Second, believers place themselves at great risk of succumbing to Satan’s attacks if they are not on guard against him because they do not believe he exists.

In the next verse, Matthew 13:25, the description of Satan as the Lord’s enemy sets out the defining character of the devil, which is that he is opposed to the Lord and His work. In confirmation of this, the very name ‘Satan’ means ‘adversary’.¹ Accordingly, it should not surprise us to find in Matthew 13:25 that Satan is active wherever the Lord works — that is, amongst the good seed (i.e. believers). We also see that Satan starts working as soon as he has the opportunity to do so as Matthew 13:24–25 indicates. The sower’s enemy had observed him sowing his field and then immediately came into the field the moment there was an opportunity for him to undermine the sower’s work. In a similar vein, 1 Peter 5:8 states that the devil actively ‘*walks about*’ for the purpose of ‘*seeking whom he may devour*’.

On top of this, the devil is crafty and ruthlessly efficient in his assaults. The first description of him in the Bible is ‘*the serpent [who] was more crafty than any animal of the field*’ (Gen. 3:1). From the parable of the tares and the wheat, we learn that Satan chooses the best time to attack (while men slept), a secret method of attack (coming and then going his way), the most subtle form of attack (sowing indistinguishable tares among the

¹ G Morrish, *New and Concise Bible Dictionary*.

wheat) and the most devastating and long-lasting form of attack (sowing tares which would grow up side-by-side with the wheat and which could not be removed).

In the context of the kingdom of heaven, Satan has already succeeded in his attack by causing unbelievers — described in verse 38 as *‘children of the wicked one’* — to become associated with the profession of the Lord’s name in this world. However, Satan is also *our* enemy (1 Pet. 5:8). In this wider context, it is not possible to list all of the means by which he might assail us. The New Testament does not attempt to define them, but simply warns us of the devil’s intelligence and to be on guard for his *‘wiles’* (Eph. 6:11). We should recognise that Satan is much more intelligent than we are.

Finally, Matthew 13:24–30 warns us about a particular time when Satan will attack: when the Lord’s people are asleep (v. 25). It is implicit in this verse that the ‘men’ described there were servants of the sower who had been employed to guard his crop. However, they failed in their responsibility to their master as they failed to watch, lost energy and succumbed to their desire for sleep. It was the servants’ failure, and not anything to do with the sower (who had sowed *good* seed), which then enabled the enemy to come in. Believers today can fall asleep in respect of the Lord’s things — that is, neglect their responsibility to prevent Satan from coming in and corrupting. The clear instruction for us is to *‘be sober [and] vigilant’* against the devil’s attacks (1 Pet. 5:8).

Assuming that we are sober and vigilant, the Bible promises us that we can defeat Satan’s attacks so long as we put on God’s armour (Eph. 6:11, 13). Although this article is not the place to provide an exposition of Ephesians 6, we should take encouragement from verse 13: after all of the devil’s attacks throughout this evil day, the one who will be left standing will not be the devil but the believer who has trusted in God’s armour.

Mark Grasso

CHRISTIAN CONFLICT

There has been so much controversy and fighting amongst believers, carried on in a not very becoming spirit, that to many Christians the whole idea of conflict has become highly objectionable, and the natural swing of the pendulum has carried them into a mental attitude which comes perilously near to being that of 'peace at any price'. Others again there are who, although they are unwilling to definitely compromise with evil and are therefore prepared to separate from it in the last resort, cannot bring themselves to resist it in any way that would involve conflict and fighting in the cause of truth.

There are of course some Christians of a combative spirit. Being naturally pugnacious they do not need to be urged to fight, they only need to be urged to fight a good fight, and to let it be the fight of faith. The rest of us, however, are more in danger of displaying the spirit of fear, rather than that of power and love and of a sound mind, and consequently of being ashamed of the testimony of our Lord; we need, as a result, to remember that we are each called to be '*a good soldier of Jesus Christ*' (2 Tim. 2:3).

There is no escaping conflict while we are in this world. The situation is such that in one way or another we are bound to meet it, even though we diligently avoid it. We may indeed borrow the figure which the prophet Amos used in connection with the day of the Lord and say that it is '*as if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him*' (Amos 5:19). The more we scheme to escape fightings without, the more likely we are to fall victims to the conflict produced by uneasy misgivings and fears within.

One distinction must be clearly drawn at the outset: there is much conflict experienced by Christians which is by no means proper Christian conflict. Proper Christian conflict is described in such scriptures as Ephesians 6 and 2 Corinthians 10, with sundry allusions to it in other of Paul's epistles. In Romans 7 and Galatians 5, there are descriptions of what certainly are conflicts, and of a sort no Christian can well escape, yet they are, at best, of

a preparatory nature, as being fitted to qualify the believer who goes through them and learns the lessons that they are designed to teach to take up the wars of the Lord as a good soldier of Christ.¹

Romans 7 gives us the earliest experience that can be spoken of as conflict: the flesh and the renewed mind. It is an old saying that it takes two to make a quarrel, and what that chapter details for us is an experience that must be utterly unknown until the renewed mind, the *'inward man'*, is possessed. As born of the flesh we are flesh and nothing else, and consequently the reign of flesh is absolute and undisputed; it is only when born again that we possess the *'inward man'* of which Romans 7:22 speaks and a conflict with the flesh arises. True, the conflict described in that chapter is a very one-sided affair. The victory seems to lie wholly with the flesh, for the cry is: *'the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do'* and consequently, *'I am carnal, sold under sin'* (Rom. 7:19, 14). Had it been *'the evil which I would not, that I sometimes do'*, or even *'that I frequently do'*, it would have left room for an occasional gleam of victory. As it is, the gloom of defeat is unrelieved. The *'inward man'* is there, but in practice is overwhelmed by the flesh. The *'law of the mind'* is subjugated and rendered impotent by *'the law of sin which is in my members'* (Rom. 7:23).

If we ask, 'What has produced this distressing experience?' the answer is: 'The law'. The chapter opens with a statement as to the law and the relation to it of both the Jew and the Christian. It goes on to detail the practical workings of the law upon the renewed

¹ These conflicts are preparatory in the sense that, unless resolved in a scriptural way, they prevent the believer usefully taking part in true Christian conflict. Romans 7 shows that our flesh does not have the strength to do good and to overcome evil desires. This is the conflict experienced by the soul before it knows deliverance. Galatians 5 shows that the Holy Spirit does have the power to make us do good and overcome evil inclinations. The Spirit and our flesh will always remain diametrically opposed to each other. Our task is to recognise that God condemned sin in the flesh (in the death of Christ: Rom. 8:3) and, therefore, to judge and confess any manifestation of our flesh. Then we can walk in the Spirit, not fulfilling the lust of the flesh (Gal. 5:17). However, the Bible never suggests that a believer should enter into battle with his flesh. Christian conflict is directed against the enemy outside of us (Eph. 6:11–20; 2 Cor. 10:3–6; Jude 3). (Eds.).

mind, and one of the chapter's most significant features is the omission of all reference to the Spirit of God. Now it is not God's purpose or desire that anyone should remain permanently in this distressing condition of impotence and defeat. Hence Romans 8 follows, and this chapter begins with Christ and the Spirit of God. The law is only mentioned in verse 3 to be dismissed as supplanted by God's own act in and through the death of Christ, and the rest of that wonderful chapter is simply full of the Spirit of God, the varied capacities He fills and His many activities.

The two chapters, then, are in sharpest contrast: Romans 7 reveals the action of the law upon the renewed mind, only making it acutely conscious of impotence and defeat, while Romans 8 presents the action of the Spirit of God, making it conscious of liberty, life, relationship, coming glory and present omnipotent love which leads to believers being not only victorious, but '*more than conquerors*' (Rom. 8:37). Even so, the conflict described is in the main an internal one, preparatory to the believer being able and fit to enter into the conflict which is properly Christian. It is, so to speak, the clearing up of a condition of civil war and internal strife. Only when that is settled² can the wars of the Lord be entered upon by any of us.

Galatians 5 has the same internal conflict in view, but approaches the subject from a different angle. If Romans 7 is the flesh versus the inward man instructed and enlightened by the law, Galatians 5 is the flesh versus the Spirit, and the position is exactly reversed. Whereas the renewed mind, directed and urged forward by the law, is no match for the flesh, the flesh is no match for the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). Still, by the possession of the Spirit the personality and individual responsibility of the believer is not suppressed. He has to walk in the Spirit, and then, and only then, he does not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. Then it is that he does not do the things that otherwise he would.

When we turn to Ephesians 6 we have a conflict contemplated

² By the believer realising that they have been delivered from their '*body of death*', as explained in Romans 7:24–25 (Eds.).

which is distinctively Christian. Ephesians sets forth the Christian calling and the church's place according to the splendour of the thoughts and purposes of God. All is made known to us that we may be in the power and strength of these great realities and thus live our lives in this world, and fulfil our various earthly relationships and responsibilities, according to them. When the apostle reaches the final point in his epistle (Eph. 6:10), he assumes that his readers are standing in the full power and enjoyment of these realities, and instructs them as to the whole armour of God which they must take and wear if they are to stand.

The greatest possible testimony in this world is the saint standing in the full consciousness and enjoyment of the calling and the purposes of God. Hence the devil and his agents always make the most strenuous efforts to dislodge such a one from the spiritual condition which alone makes the position an effective testimony. His efforts consequently are directed against the truth, the righteousness, the peace, the faith, the practical salvation, the word of God, and the prayers which are the preserving elements of Christian life; and to maintain these seven things, and wear them as the armour of the soul, needs no small measure of diligence and watchfulness.

Jude, in his epistle, exhorts us to *'earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints'* (Jude 3), and he does not close his brief word without intimating in verses 20 and 21 that our spiritual condition must be sound if we are to earnestly contend aright. Our contending, however, and the conflict it may entail — which is obviously one branch of proper Christian conflict — are carried out in the world of men. The conflict of Ephesians 6 lies behind all that. It takes place not in the visible world of men, but in the unseen realm of spirit: *'our struggle is not against blood and flesh, but against principalities, against authorities, against the universal lords of this darkness, against spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies. For this reason take to you the panoply of God ...'* (Eph. 6:12, 13).

We know but little about these great spiritual forces of evil which are at the disposal of Satan. We are permitted to get

an occasional glimpse of their activities in Scripture, as, for instance, in Daniel, where we see them engaged in endeavouring to thwart God's purposes in regard to Israel (Dan. 10:1, 13). It is probable, too — alas! — that we know still less of any actual conflict with them, inasmuch as we are so little, if at all, in the spiritual condition, coupled with the knowledge of the full Christian position, which makes it worth while to them to attack us. Still they exist, and doubtless are the originators of many trying, yet obscure, trials and testings, which can only be met by having on the whole armour of God.

If any of our readers find the contemplation of conflict such as this rather terrifying, we would like to reassure and encourage them by mentioning a fact which is not apparent in our authorised translation. The Greek word translated '*rulers ... of this world*' ('universal lords': JND) is *kosmokrator*: world ruler. These evil spiritual beings bear rule, but their power is restricted to the limits of the *kosmos* or world order which has been affected by sin. In 2 Corinthians 6:18 we have God assuring any of His saints, who may suffer by reason of faithfulness in separating from the world, of His Fatherly grace and protection, and He presents Himself as the Almighty: the *pantokrator* or the ruler of all things. We shall not tremble before the rulers of the world order if we realise that we are under the protection of the ruler of all things.

Another phase of proper Christian conflict comes before us in 2 Corinthians 10:3–5. The conflict of Ephesians 6 is, as we have seen, mainly defensive; the only offensive weapon named being the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. Here the conflict is essentially of the aggressive, offensive order, and there are weapons — the word is plural, for there are more than one. These weapons are effectual to '*the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations [or reasonings: margin], and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*'. Here is a task which involves conflict indeed! To pull down strongholds of stone or iron is easy compared with dismantling strongholds of unbelief and of the powers of darkness and

casting down the vain reasonings of a darkened yet proud and self-satisfied mind so that the whole soul and mind, and every thought in that mind, is in subjection to God with a glad and ready obedience like the obedience of Christ.

Is this the objective of Christian warfare? Does the servant of Christ go forth into the world with the word of God with such a task before him? Then we instinctively and at once feel that nothing but superhuman and miraculous power can avail. To pit mere human eloquence, learning, skill or intellect against such strongholds, or to attempt to wheedle men round the corner of their rebellion and self-will by those arts and sciences which appeal solely to the sentiments and emotions, is worse folly than that of attacking Gibraltar with a pea-shooter. Nothing but the power of God will do.

Yet the power of God works through His people, and through weapons which are not carnal but mighty through God. What are these weapons? Well, see the apostles in Acts 6! Well clad in that spiritual armour which enabled them to turn aside the attempt of the *'world rulers of this darkness'* to divert them from their true service to *'serving tables'*, they address themselves to their proper business saying, *'we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word'* (v. 4). The ministry of the word, or as 1 Corinthians 1:18–21 puts it: *'the preaching'* — *'the preaching of the cross'*, is one great spiritual weapon. Prayer is another.

When it is a question of the word as the link between our souls and God, the order is first the word of God and then prayer. He must speak to us before we speak to Him. When it is the word flowing as testimony from us to men, the order is first prayer and then the ministry of the word, for we must begin by recognising our absolute dependence on God, and speak *to* Him before we speak *for* Him.

Neither prayer nor the ministry of the word, if carried out after the apostolic pattern (see 1 Cor. 2:1–5), would strike the man of the world as powerful weapons. As a man after the flesh he would only appreciate fleshly weapons, and, if religiously inclined, he would wish to enlist, in the good cause of bettering humanity,

all the usual agencies which experience has shown to exert an influence on men's minds. His human weapons will produce human results which doubtless often carry with them a certain amount of human benefit. Spiritual weapons alone produce spiritual results. If we use these which God has appointed, then they become 'mighty through God' to accomplish divine results. The spiritual weapons we have named are not of course the only ones. In Matthew 17:20–21, for instance, the Lord Himself mentions faith and fasting, in addition to prayer, as spiritual weapons.

It is of course very much easier to use a carnal weapon, if we happen to possess it, than a spiritual one. If a man is naturally brilliant and consequently able to wield 'excellency of speech or of wisdom', he will find it far easier to move people by an oration sparkling with gems of rhetoric or knowledge than to be a vessel of God's power through faith and prayer and fasting, and he may even deceive himself into counting all the surface results of the former methods as genuine! Yet only that which is wrought by the power of God abides.

Many of our readers may entirely agree with us that it is very easy to pick up carnal weapons and use them in connection with the work of the gospel, since they are so lavishly used in Christendom today, and heartily applaud our calling attention to it in these pages. Yet we would remind them — and, indeed, all of us — that it is just as important to use spiritual weapons only in seeking the edification and perfection of believers and in the necessary conflicts for the maintenance of the truth. We have before now seen well-instructed Christians use very carnal weapons in the endeavour to stop their less-instructed brethren using carnal weapons in their gospel work! This will not do.

We have been set free from servitude to sin that we may be servants of God. Let us remember in the conflicts that His service engenders that not only must the power be that of His Spirit, but the weapons we use be such as are in keeping with His Spirit and sanctioned by His word.

F B Hole

FRIENDLY FIRE

Friendly fire! In the heat of battle the hasty push of a button or confusion over co-ordinates can kill and injure soldiers and civilians who should never have been in the crosshairs. There are few things more tragic and shocking when we think of the victims and their families and comrades. But what of those who fired at their own side? They must be horror-struck when they discover what they have done even if it turns out to be an accident for which they cannot be blamed. No one wants to shoot a comrade!

In spiritual things our enemies are God's enemies. It cannot be otherwise because we are bound up with Him in *'the bundle of the living'* (1 Sam. 25:29). As Christians this identification of interest goes much further than it did in Old Testament times. Paul writes to the Corinthians, *'Now ye are Christ's body, and members in particular'* (1 Cor. 12:27). Our Lord's words to him, when as Saul of Tarsus he was on his way to Damascus to persecute those of the way, anticipate this most intimately: *'Saul, Saul, why dost thou persecute me?'* (Acts 9:4).¹

Wonderful mystery now revealed: we are united to Christ, our heavenly Head, and to one another as members of His body. This intimate identification, brought about by the Holy Spirit, should motivate us to be victorious in our spiritual warfare, but sadly we often only think of the latter as an individual matter. We need to think more of the impact we can have on the interests of Christ and His people, and, as a result, the collective and corporate testimony. The writer of this piece — perhaps many who read it — would have to admit to not weighing these considerations sufficiently in the past. Let us not make the mistake of doing

¹ Christians who suffer the kind of persecution today that Saul meted out in the first century need our prayers (Acts 26:9-11; Heb. 13:3). There are signs too that persecution may return to countries where Christians have had liberty to practise their faith for many years. Whatever the Lord allows before He comes, we can be sure He will continue to stand by His own as He stood by Paul when he was persecuted, saying, 'Be of good courage' (Acts 23:11). This article, however, concentrates on the more subtle conflicts of life all Christians experience.

the work of the enemies of God and His people. Take these examples and their divine remedies.

Unjudged Sin

'When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my groaning all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture was turned into the drought of summer. Selah' (Ps. 32:3–4). It was a bad place to be but it would have been much worse if Jehovah had left David to continue his concealment of his sin in *'the matter of Urijah the Hittite'* (1 Ki. 15:5). His dealings and David's feelings paved the way for the prophet's solemn pronouncement, *'Thou art the man!'* and the king's sad confession, *'I have sinned against Jehovah'* (2 Sam. 12:7, 13a). Nathan could say to David, *'Jehovah has also put away thy sin: thou shalt not die'*, but he had to add, *'Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of Jehovah to blaspheme, even the child that is born to thee shall certainly die'* (2 Sam. 12:13b–14).

It is sobering to read Paul's words to the Corinthians: *'On this account many among you are weak and infirm, and a good many are fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, so were we not judged'* (1 Cor. 11:30–31). Are we right to assume that only those who committed the sins Paul writes about suffered in these ways? When Israel went down to defeat at Ai, Jehovah said to Joshua, *'Israel hath sinned'*, but it was only Achan who *'took of the accursed thing'* (Josh. 7:1, 11).² As for David's sin, the sword never departed from his house and evil befell his wives. Sin has its consequences, and unjudged sin can wreak havoc on others. So it was, of course, with the very first sin (Rom. 5:12).

When we sin, the Lord Jesus as our advocate restores us to communion with the Father (1 John 2:1). The Holy Spirit — by His very presence in us as *'another comforter'* (John 14:16)³ — complements this (1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 4:30; Jas. 4:5). Their dual ministry produces a sense of sin and misery within that presses on us as David's feelings did in Psalm 32. This brings us to repentance and confession (1 John 1:9)⁴ and proves we have a

new nature else we would not respond. We may resist, perhaps because we are unwilling to give up what is wrong in our lives, but if we do, the longer we remain defiled and spiritually feeble, and the more the Father has to bring His discipline to bear on us (Heb. 12:5–6, 11). What worship and witness can we render to God and to others in the meantime? What encouragement and counsel can we give to our fellow brethren? We are more likely to discourage and mislead than help them. We risk disrupting assembly life.⁵ Self-judgment and confession are the twin remedies, and the lowly spirit they engender will equip us to help others also as Peter discovered and Paul taught (Luke 22:32; Gal. 6:1).

Despising and Judging

There were Christians in the assembly in Rome from Gentile and Jewish backgrounds. Paul's letter to them addresses the potential for difficulties between them because of this difference. The former, impressed by the thorough deliverance the gospel had given them from their prior lives of sin, had good grounds for eating all things. The latter, brought up under a law instituted by God Himself, might still have reservations about eating food the Old Testament forbade as unclean. Here was scope for the evil one to drive a wedge between the two: the former would make little of the latter for their lack of faith and the latter would judge the former for their indulgence. What to do? Paul writes in terms that make it very much a matter of individual responsibility:

² No doubt Israel's lack of dependence on God in the matter of Achan betrays the nation's poor spiritual state, which prevented it from detecting Achan's sin.

³ Advocate and Comforter are the same word in the original language. It means intercessor or consoler; someone who comes alongside to help us in every way. J.N. Darby notes in his translation of 1 John 2:1: 'So Christ on high; the Spirit here for saints'.

⁴ The effect of the Lord's look at Peter when he denied Him is illustrative of this (although Peter did not have the Holy Spirit indwelling him at that time). Scripture says he 'wept bitterly'. It was the start of the process of restoration (Luke 22:61–62).

⁵ The purpose of the provisions the Lord Jesus gives in Matthew 18:15–18 are not to occupy the gatherings of His people with the offences we commit against one another but rather to resolve them before they get to that point. We should keep short accounts with God and with one another, and be ready to forgive. See also 1 Corinthians 6:7, James 5:14–16, Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13.

'Let not him' (Rom. 14:3). When the enemy tries to make God's people despise or judge one another the only way to overcome him is to judge the tendency to do his bidding in our own hearts. It is as we each do this that we shall all be delivered.

Chapters 14 and 15 of Romans taken together with other passages show it was a matter of principle with Paul not to put *'a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear'* (Acts 15:10). By disciples he meant the Gentile-born Christians at Antioch and elsewhere. Christ had set them free in freedom (Gal. 5:1) and it was imperative that they were not misled into law-keeping. In contrast he was longsuffering with his brethren who were Jews by birth. He would instruct and lead them out of that bondage but he would do so sensitively and patiently. As long as it did not go against God's truth He would appeal to Gentile-born believers not to offend their Jewish-born brethren: *'For if on account of meat thy brother is grieved, thou walkest no longer according to love. Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ has died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he that in this serves the Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men. So then let us pursue the things which tend to peace, and things whereby one shall build up another'* (Rom. 14:15–19).

If this was how the apostle exhorted Christians regarding the law of God, how much more his words apply to us when we do not see eye-to-eye about our own exercises. We should not run rough-shod over one another but rather please each one *'his neighbour with a view to what is good, to edification. For the Christ also did not please himself'* (Rom. 15:2–3). Who do we want to be like: Diotrophes, who ended up refusing the apostle John, or Gaius, who held the truth even as he walked in it and whose love was witnessed to before the assembly, even by strangers (3 John 3, 6, 9)? In regard to apprehending the truth itself, Paul gave room for believers to 'catch up' but not to 'go back' (Phil. 3:15–16; Heb. 10:38).

Envy and Emulation

There are at least two Greek words translated ‘envy’ in the New Testament: one conveys the warmth of passion⁶ we can have against someone, and the other the shrivelling or withering effect of ill will. Unless we judge envy, it breeds bitterness and emulation and has the power to divide and distance believers as much as it does unsaved people in the world. The list of things in this life that envy can play on is a long one: money, possessions, education, status, talents, looks, health, family and so on. But it does not stop there. We can envy spiritual things too: a brother’s or a sister’s gift from the Lord, their rapport with young people or popularity among the saints generally, a brother’s ability to minister from the platform, and so on.

Who among us can deny having had some or other of these thoughts about other brethren? But how dangerous they can be if we do not judge them! They loosen instead of strengthen the bonds between us (Eph. 4:1–3, 15–16). We find reasons to downgrade a brother’s or a sister’s spiritual abilities. We cast aspersions on their motives, pour doubt on their devotion to Christ and highlight their mistakes. We may share this poison with other brethren or even drop it in our children’s ears. We elevate ourselves, seek where we can to put the brother or sister we envy in the shade and become their rivals. ‘For’, as James writes, *‘where emulation and strife are, there is disorder and every evil thing’* (Jas. 3:16).

Ultimately, envy arises from dissatisfaction. At the heart of his exhortations to the Colossian Christians about healthy assembly life, Paul writes: *‘be thankful’* (Col. 3:15). Later in his second letter to Timothy he says of the last days that *‘men shall be ... ungrateful’* (2 Tim. 3:1–2). This is where we can put distance between ourselves and the world, but do we? The writer to the Hebrews certainly expected it of them even though their goods had been plundered: *‘Let your conversation be without love of money, satisfied with your present circumstances’* (Heb. 13:5; 10:34). James puts his finger on lack of satisfaction as the

⁶ This word is also used for the warmth of passion we can have for someone because we want the best for him or her (2 Cor. 11:2).

reason for the wars and fightings among his readers: *'Is it not thence,—from your pleasures, which war in your members? Ye lust and have not: ye kill and are full of envy, and cannot obtain ...'* (Jas. 4:1–2). Paul traced the same kind of behaviour among the Corinthians to their fleshly condition of soul: *'For whereas there are among you emulation and strife, are ye not carnal, and walk according to man?'* (1 Cor. 3:3).

What will help us overcome this? Occupation with Christ, but not to the exclusion of the brethren we envy. It can never be that we love Him as an alternative to loving them. To do so is tantamount to dividing Christ for we are members — together — of Him (1 Cor. 1:13). If we love Him, we must love them, and occupation with Him will help us do this because we will become more like Him. Peter had to learn this lesson after he downgraded his fellow disciples in the process of declaring his devotion to his Lord (Matt. 26:33; John 21:15). Paul exhorts the Philippian believers: *'let nothing be in the spirit of strife or vain glory, but, in lowliness of mind, each esteeming the other as more excellent than themselves; regarding not his own qualities, but each those of others also. For let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus'* (Phil. 2:3–5). Yes, we should look for what is of Christ in one another. This is also the antidote for the off-putting effect of those foibles we find in one another on closer acquaintance.

But let us also be careful not to provoke envy. A tendency to brag and blow, or to show off, can do this. We should use what God has given us not to promote ourselves but to glorify the Lord Jesus and build up His people. Surely Paul's true yokefellow at Philippi was of this self-effacing calibre and could be trusted to help Euodia and Syntyche respond to the apostle's exhortation to *'be of the same mind in the Lord'* (Phil. 4:2–3).

Division

Paul exhorted the Corinthians *'by the name of our Lord Jesus, that ye all say the same thing, and that there be not among you divisions; but that ye be perfectly united in the same mind and in the same opinion'* (1 Cor. 1:10). Why was this exhortation given,

when they were allowing such serious sin and their behaviour was so disorderly? Because they were the assembly of God in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2). What a dishonour it would be to Him if the internal divisions Paul writes about in the first and third chapters of the letter were exposed to unbelieving Jews and simple Gentiles. Our Lord's prayer regarding us — *'that they may be all one, as thou Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou has sent me'* (John 17:21) — would guard against this. But God could not go on with evil or disorder so Paul wrote his letter to exhort the assembly to diligently put things right. Praise God, they did (2 Cor. 7:9–11).

How things have changed. Christians have given up maintaining the truth of God in a united way. They have either compromised it to stay together or formed narrower fellowships than *'the fellowship of [God's] Son Jesus Christ our Lord'* (1 Cor. 1:9) to help them maintain their particular beliefs and practices more easily. This has weakened the Christian testimony by diluting and fragmenting it but has not absolved us of the responsibility to practise unity. Christ died to bring it about (John 11:52–53), and if we seek to gather to His name we should desire and strive for it with all those who seek to do the same. This is *'using diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace'* (Eph. 4:3) and the only course consistent with the one fellowship to which we have been called.

When the truth of God and the honour of Christ are at stake — doctrinally or morally — and it is impossible to rectify this by discipline, Paul's words apply: *'Let every one who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity'* (2 Tim. 2:19). But this should be done in prayerful dependence on God; with a heavy heart and not a high hand. Sadly the flesh — perhaps in the form of the envy and emulation we have just considered — marks many divisions. It was only too evident in the behaviour of the Corinthians who were forming parties within the assembly and trying to give credit to these by attaching names to them (1 Cor. 1:11–12; 3:1–7; 4:6–7). This might be a natural thing to do, but that was just the point: they were acting like men.

We might have thrown up our hands and pronounced the situation hopeless or taken pre-emptory action. Neither is God's way. He looks to us to work at winning our brethren, not just proving them wrong. It is often said that Phinehas was very handy with his javelin (Num. 25:7–8). He was, but only when there was no alternative — in Numbers 34 the command of Jehovah had gone out and the plague had already begun. Later, however, when just as energetically he challenged the two-and-a-half tribes about the altar they had built by Jordan, he not only gave them an opportunity to put things right but listened to their explanation for their actions. He returned to the rest of the people with this news and it was '*good in their sight*', saving the nation from division and conflict (Jos. 22:10–34). These are the qualities that help to maintain faithfulness to God *and* the unity of His people.

Controversy

Paul begged Timothy to remain in Ephesus to '*enjoin some not to teach other doctrines, nor to turn their minds to fables and interminable genealogies which bring questionings rather than further God's dispensation, which is in faith*' (1 Tim. 1:3b–4). Some Christians seem to thrive on controversy and delight in unsettling their brethren by throwing in question after question or problem after problem like hand grenades. Is this right? Is it of God? Let us be sure the issues we raise are genuine before we occupy our brethren with them.

Looking back on church history, God has enabled Christians to recover the truths pertaining to the person of His Son, then the basis of our salvation and lastly the assembly and its privileges and hope. No doubt, the men He used to do this — Athanasius, Luther and the other reformers, and the early brethren — were called controversialists by others, but actually they were earnest contenders '*for the faith once delivered to the saints*' (Jude 3). They dealt in certainties not doubts, and their words and actions have helped establish believers on the Lord Jesus who have come after them. Let us be like them, building ourselves up on our 'most holy faith' and passing the truth on to the next generation while we wait for the Lord to come for us (Jude 20; 2 Tim. 2:2).

Lack of Commitment

Timothy is the last of twelve men of God in Scripture. Their cases show that a man of God is someone who stands firm for Him in a difficult day. Paul's accolade, '*O man of God*' (1 Tim. 6:11), conveys the particular respect and affection he had for his '*true child in faith*' (1 Tim. 1:2). He could commit things of value to him and rely on Him to look after them. This is beautifully illustrated by his words of commendation to the Philippians: '*I have no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on. For all seek their own things, not the things of Jesus Christ*' (Phil. 2:20–21). When all who were in Asia had turned away from the apostle, and even Demas his erstwhile companion had forsaken him '*having loved the present age*' (2 Tim. 1:15; 4:10), he could console himself with memories of Timothy (2 Tim. 1:3–5).

While none of us would call ourselves a man of God, let us cultivate Timothy's commitment and reliability. He was comparatively young so these qualities are for younger as well as older believers. Like us he faced many difficulties — for instance he was frequently ill (1 Tim. 5:23) — and needed encouragement (2 Tim. 1:6–14). Did Paul advise him to fade into the background or take a gap year? No, the apostle who would '*most gladly spend and be utterly spent*' for the souls of the people of God (2 Cor. 12:15) exhorted him to get 'stuck in': '*Take thy share in suffering*' (2 Tim. 2:3).

Let us apply this to ourselves in connection with the gatherings. How discouraging it is to others — especially when numbers are small — to find our seats empty when they thought we were going to be at the meeting. How can we hope to build up the testimony or even maintain it if we do not get out to the meetings? After all, this is one feature of the church in its early, powerful, Pentecostal days that we can still replicate today: '*And they persevered in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in breaking of bread and prayers*' (Acts 2:42). The devil will use every trick he can to keep us at home or work or somewhere else. He knows the Lord will lose out (Matt. 18:20; Ps. 50:5), our brethren will lose out and we will lose out (Heb. 10:23–25).

He is hoping this will put the light of the testimony out! Let us not help him.

Worldliness

John warns us: *'Love not the world, nor the things in the world. If any one love the world, the love of the Father is not in him; because all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world'* (1 John 2:15–16). Man's political, economic and social system appears very attractive at times but the Christian should always see it for what it is: it lies in the wicked one (1 John 5:19) who appeals to lust and pride whether in the Garden of Eden or the wilderness (Gen. 3:6; Luke 4:4–13) and is full of corruption and violence from start to finish (Gen. 4:23; 6:11–12; Rom. 3:9–19; 2 Pet. 1:4). Worst of all, it has cast out Christ. James is very 'black and white': *'friendship with the world is enmity with God'* (Jas. 4:4). Worldliness takes many forms but the New Testament does not make it a reason in itself for division or withdrawing from fellowship. Its dangers lie in the thoughts, words and actions it spawns in our lives and the way it saps us spiritually to the dishonour of the Lord Jesus and the damage of His people. This should bring us to our knees in prayer and supplication, and occupation with Christ. He alone can draw us from the world for His name's sake and the blessing of His people so that we might have worship to give Him and spiritual food to feed one another.

Conclusion

We live in difficult times but let us take heart. The Lord Jesus is ever faithful (Ps. 16:8; 2 Tim. 2:13; Heb. 13:5, 8). There are no equipment shortages or defects in His armoury (Eph. 6:13–18; 1 Thess. 5:8). Let us not fire the devil's bullets at one another but stand shoulder to shoulder in the front line against the enemies of God's people for His glory and our mutual blessing.

Simon Attwood

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