

Christ: the Prince of Peace

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It is hardly possible to imagine a greater spectacle of unrest and discord than that which the world presents at the present time. In every sphere the same phenomena are observable. Politically and industrially the whole civilised world has been shaken of late, nowhere more so than in Great Britain, where disorder of the gravest kind was only just averted by the outbreak of the colossal war of nations which is now engaging every one's attention. With religious strife and discord we have long been unhappily familiar.

Under such circumstances it is not surprising that the drift of men's desires is in the direction of peace, and that the scriptural picture of a golden age of a thousand years' duration, when there shall be "abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth," and "quietness and assurance for ever," has caught the popular fancy, so that the "millennium" is often referred to by people who have little idea what it means, and very mistaken notions as to how it is to be brought to pass.

It is the object of this paper to point out how the age of peace is to be reached, and also how, during the present age of evil and unrest, peace amongst the saints of God may be promoted.

If reference be made to the passages from which the two brief quotations above were made it will be seen at once that millennial peace depends for its realization upon authority and power being vested in Christ, and consequently righteousness being established in the earth. Psalm 72 begins with "Give the King Thy judgments, O God . . . He shall judge Thy people with righteousness," and it is "in His days" that there shall be "abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth" (ver. 7). Isaiah 32 declares that "the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever" (ver. 17).

What lies at the root of all the discord so painfully manifest? The perverse and wicked will of man, which manifests itself in a thousand ways. At the present time Europe resounds with the fearful clash of national will-power, millions of units bound by racial and national ties focussing their wills upon a common end, and giving expression to them by their representatives. This is, perhaps, the most powerful display of human will, but it is seen in ever-varying degree in every kind of society and sect in which men have banded themselves together, and in every individual, down to the little child who kicks and screams and destroys the peace of his nursery, because he cannot have his own way. *Moreover, self* is the centre around which every thought of our wills revolves; hence God is dethroned, and all that is right displaced. To-day it is man's will and unrighteousness instead of the rule of Christ and consequently righteousness.

The history of the world is one long and dismal story of human schemes and struggles to find a satisfactory solution of the present state of things. This is particularly the case since the coming of Christ, when by rejecting Him men refused the divinely given solution. They killed the Prince of Life, who is also the Prince of Peace. Things will never be right until He returns.

To the day of Christ's return and glory the Old Testament prophets make abundant reference, and again and again they connect the peace that will characterise the millennial age with the judgments that will precede its establishment, and the strong and righteous government that will mark its duration. A couple of passages may be cited as examples of this:-

"Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end" (Isa. 9: 6, 7).

"In the way of Thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for Thee . . . for when Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. . . . Lord, Thou wilt ordain peace for us" (Isa. 26: 8, 9, 12).

The times of the Gentiles started with the most absolute autocracy the world has ever witnessed, in the world-wide dominion of Nebuchadnezzar, and prophecy indicates that they will end with the autocratic power of the "beast," in spite of the fact that at present democracy is all the rage. This latter, which has been defined as "government of the people, by the people, for the people," is about as far as possible from the divine ideal, which, as indicated in the scriptures above quoted, is government of the people, by Christ, for God; and therefore for man's true blessing.

At the present time not a few are cherishing the false hope that this war will be the last: the idea being that the curse of militarism is largely bound up with the autocratic ideals cherished by the Kaiser, and that the overthrow of his power will pave the way for the spread of broader and more democratic ideas, under the influence of which war will become impossible. Democracy and peace are to the minds of such almost synonymous terms. How pitiful a delusion! Such a thought can only be held by ignoring the fact of the essential sinfulness of human nature, attested by thousands of years of human history. The idea is denied also by experience, for the only time in the past when pure democracy held sway blazes like a lurid beacon of warning upon the page of history: I refer to the great French Revolution, with its reign of Terror. Last, but not least, it is absolutely denied by Scripture.

I refer to these matters because they are by no means unimportant for the Christian. Far too many of God's saints have never seriously reviewed the position in the light of the Word of God, and hence accept these great world movements, political or otherwise, at their face value without investigation, and get caught in the current of the world. As a result, they yoke themselves unequally with unbelievers, in plain disobedience to the Word of God, and they consecrate their energies to the laborious building up of systems which the coming of Christ will destroy - just as children labour in the erecting of sand castles, which the next tide will wash away. Would to God that each of His children were diligent and untiring in His work! — the work that is in keeping with His plan for this dispensation: viz. the bearing of witness to Christ unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1: 8), and the taking out of the nations, as a result, a people for His name (Acts 15: 14).

Peace upon earth, then, will be reached when by judgments God shall remove every peace-disturber, purging out of His kingdom all things that offend: it will be maintained throughout the millennial age by government exercised in the hand of Christ. The original peace of an innocent creation was broken when man forsook his allegiance to God, and by disobedience withdrew himself from His direction; it will only be regained when men come back with chastened spirits, and submit once more to the control of God. The divine purpose to "gather together [or, head up] in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth," will then be fulfilled. The will of that great and glorious Head will prevail to the exclusion of every other will — "of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end."

During the present age the church, which is the habitation of God by the Spirit, is left in this world of unrest as an abode of peace. Had it maintained this character with ranks unbroken what a testimony for Christ it would have been! We cannot, however, read further than the sixth chapter of the Acts without discovering the first symptoms of that disease which has since developed into a raging

and destructive epidemic. The murmuring that arose amongst the Jewish converts to Christianity because certain Greek-speaking widows were neglected, as compared with their Hebrew sisters, might have seemed a small thing, in reality it meant a great deal.

When we turn to the Epistles we find that in nearly all of them some allusion is made to the danger that threatened by reason of the inveterate tendency of the flesh toward dissension, bickerings, and fratricidal strife. In some cases, such as those to the Corinthians, to Timothy, James, and 3 John, the warnings and rebukes lie upon the surface, and occupy a substantial part of the Epistle. In other cases it is more a question of reading between the lines; comparatively minor allusions, showing us that the same danger threatened other churches in the apostolic age, amongst them the brightest and best. It will be sufficient to specify passages which may be referred to in verification: Rom. 16: 17-20; Gal. 5: 15; Eph. 4. 31-32; Phil. 2: 1-3, Phil. 4: 8, 9; Col. 3: 13; 1 Thess. 4: 6, 1 Thess. 5: 15; 2 Thess. 3: 11-16; Titus 3: 9; Heb. 12: 12-15; 1 Peter 3: 8-9; 2 Peter 3: 14.

A very slight acquaintance with church history suffices to show how greatly the warnings contained in these scriptures have been needed, and how much the testimony of the Lord has been marred by dissension between His saints. There have been, of course, separations which have become a divinely sanctioned necessity in order to preserve God's truth from corruption. Of these we do not speak.

By and by all the saints will stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, that everything there may be brought into the light. Read Mark 9: 33 to 37 for a fore-shadowing of that day. When we are safely housed, not in Capernaum but in heaven, will He not have good reason to say to us, "What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? — What is it that through all these centuries of My absence has caused so much contention and strife? And shall we not have to hold our peace as they did: 'for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest?'"

What, then, is the root of all the trouble? Self-importance, or, in other words, pride in one or other of its many forms, never more subtle and dangerous than when acting under the cloak of religion.

And what is the remedy? In one word, CHRIST. This is indicated in the passage above quoted; for the Lord's reply was to take up a child in His arms, saying, "Whosoever shall receive one of such children in My name, receiveth Me." By which He showed that the only importance any one of them had was that which belonged to them as representative of Himself. Nothing else counts. They were each nothing; He was everything.

All this finds strong confirmation in the Epistles. We will confine ourselves to the two passages cited above from the Philippians. Having exhorted these earnest, devoted disciples to "be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind," and having warned them against strife and vainglory, He sets before them that which will produce the lowliness of mind so much to be desired. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," and there follow those verses of incomparable beauty, setting forth the mind of Christ in contrast with the mind which is in Adam and his fallen race. The first man attempted by robbery to lift himself on to an equality with God, and fell into ruin and degradation; the Second Man humbled Himself even to the death of the cross, and has been by God highly exalted. The rest of the chapter concerns three men, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus, each of whom had the mind of Christ, sinking their own interests and importance in whole-hearted devotion to Christ and His people.

If it be further inquired how this mind may be produced in us we may turn for answer to the verses in Philippians 4. Think, says he, on things that may be characterized as true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, praiseworthy. We are not here told to meditate upon so many abstract

qualities, but rather upon the things that bear that character; and there are, thank God! many such things to be found, in Scripture, in the work of the Lord, and in the saints. There is only One, however, in whom all these excellent qualities shine in equal lustre — CHRIST. Let us think, and think much, of Him. Then to your thinking add doing, practising such things as are sanctioned by the apostolic example, and the result will be this: "the God of peace shall be with you."

Peace will rule amongst the people of God when their thoughts are fixed much on Christ, and their ways are regulated by apostolic example. There is no other way.

Subjection to CHRIST, then, is the way of peace, whether presently in the millennium, or now amongst God's people.

One word more remains to be said. As Christians we must never adopt the policy of "peace at any price." To refuse to make a stand when the vital interests of Christ are at stake is an error of the first magnitude. On the other hand, let us beware of magnifying smaller matters, largely perhaps personal in character, until they become matters of grave contention. The former is the special danger of the indifferent, worldly-minded believer: the latter that of the earnest and devout.

Not long ago there was a great whirl of controversy in the Isle of Man. It concerned the sum of £1750 to be spent in advertising the island as a pleasure resort. A wise man of the world commented on it as follows: "Everybody appears to agree that this is a wise outlay. The only point is whether it should be laid out at once or divided into two parts; one for now, one for later on. No doubt a grave principle is involved! There always is in these peddling disputes. Men are past-masters in the art of justifying their littleness by reference to principle. Anyhow, the trivial difference of opinion has been sufficient to bring the Legislative Council and the House of Keys to mortal pompous opposition, It seems too silly to be true."

When I first read those words my mind instantly travelled into a different sphere, and applying them to that which has often transpired amongst believers, I felt inclined to hang my head in shame. It does seem too silly to be true, and yet, alas, how sadly true it has been. Let us accept the rebuke, even though it come from the lips of one of those children of this world who is "in his generation wiser than the children of light."

Oh for that gaze of faith fixed on Christ, that happy heart-occupation with Himself, which will lift us up above all such littleness, and cause a peace, heavenly in its origin, to dwell among the people of God.