

The Outlook

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The fact that the war is practically confined to professedly Christian countries, surely proclaims, with no uncertain voice, that God has a controversy with Christendom. We may well inquire, Why has God in the ways of His providence, allowed this fearful evil to come?

In seeking to answer this question we must remember that God has revealed Himself to men in three great ways. First, as the Creator of the universe (Gen. 1). Second, as the Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18: 25). Third, as the Saviour God who will have all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2).

AS CREATOR, God has set all His creatures in certain relationships to one another, instituting the whole circle of family relationships.

AS THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH, God has ordained certain powers for the government of the world, such as kings, rulers, and magistrates, into whose hands He has committed the sword, for the purpose of restraining evil, and the punishment of evil-doers.

AS THE SAVIOUR-GOD, He has declared His grace, in proclaiming the forgiveness of sins among all nations; through faith in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus.

How then has the world answered to this threefold revelation? Alas! is it not manifest that God has been denied — His rights refused and His mercy spurned in every way in which He has been pleased to reveal Himself, and that not only in the dark parts of the earth, where all idea of God has long since been lost, but in Christendom — professing to have the true knowledge of God ?

In the scientific world, boasting of intellect and learning, the leaders of science have flouted the idea of a Creator, and sought to explain "life" and all "natural phenomena" apart from God. The mass, confused by a display of learning, is quite willing to accept evolution, or any other wild theory of man's infidel mind; and thus all thought of God, as Creator, is fading from the minds of men. But in giving up God as the Creator, there necessarily follows the loosening of all those relationships which the Creator instituted. Thus we see, on all hands, family relationships breaking up, and, as the inevitable result, an enormous increase of immorality and corruption.

In the political world, the government of the world is conducted increasingly without any reference to God. Men pass their laws, make treaties, enter into alliances, go to war, and patch up peace, according to the will of the people, and without any thought of God. And, leaving God out, the door has been left open for every kind of political unrighteousness. Truth is displaced by diplomatic lying; principle has to give place to policy; right has to go down before might. The power of the sword, instead of being used to restrain evil, becomes the instrument of expressing the cruelty, lust, and hatred of men attempting to rule without God; and thus violence fills the earth.

In the religious world, in Christendom (of which we speak), we find on the one hand a number of professedly orthodox sects, and, on the other hand, an ever-increasing number of anti-Christian sects.

The anti-Christian sects, such as Christian Science, Millennial Dawnism, Seventh Day Adventists, Christadelphianism, Mormonism, the Tongues Movement, and others, are all alike in this, that they more or less plainly deny the Deity of Christ and His atoning work.

But what of the professedly orthodox sects? Alas! we find in nearly all these, that "Higher

Criticism" has undermined implicit faith in the Bible as the Word of God; gross materialism refuses all that is miraculous — the virgin birth of Christ, the miracles of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ; Unitarianism (no longer confined to Unitarians) denies the Deity of Christ; a barren morality, expressing itself in good works to men, displaces the atoning work of Christ; human organization sets aside the Spirit of God: humanitarianism denies eternal punishment, and a gross worldliness excludes all belief in the coming of Christ. Men of the religious world are treading "under foot the Son of God," counting "the blood of the covenant an unholy thing," and doing "despite unto the spirit of grace."

The eastern section of that which professes the name of Christ is marked by idolatry; the western section is characterized either by the superstition of Rome or the rationalism of Protestant countries. But all these evils — idolatry, superstition, and materialism — lead by different roads to the same end — practical infidelity, or the entire exclusion of God, in fact, if not in name.

Whether then we look at the intellectual world, the political world, or the religious world — in every sphere — we find the same terrible sin, the FORSAKING OF GOD.

But what about true Christians? For in the midst of this corrupt Christendom there are thousands upon thousands of the true disciples of Christ — men and women — in whom God has wrought by His Spirit. Scripture speaks of them "as the salt of the earth." But how comes it then that they exercise so small a preserving effect upon the world? The exhortation of the Lord was plain: "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another." Alas, so far are they from preserving the world that they have not even kept themselves pure and unspotted from its evil; so far from maintaining peace in the world, they have not even maintained peace among themselves; indeed so far are they from maintaining peace among themselves that they have become a scandal and a byword through their perpetual quarrels and divisions. So that, in spite of the fact that there are devoted men of God in the world, must we not sorrowfully confess that, speaking generally, the Lord's people are marked by loss of first love; by following what is right in their own eyes rather than holding the Head; by a narrow sectarianism instead of viewing one another as members of the body of Christ; by bitterness rather than love to one another; by worldliness and earthly-mindedness instead of maintaining the stranger and pilgrim character of the heavenly calling; by ease and sloth rather than energy and zeal in the service of the Lord? Thus it has come to pass that the salt has largely lost its savour. View Christendom how we will, on every hand we are faced with failure and ruin.

What a world lies under the eye of a holy God! Heathendom without the knowledge of God: Mohammedanism with a perverted knowledge of God: Christendom forsaking God: and the mass of true Christians backsliding from God.

God bears long with evil, but there comes a time when the glory of His name demands that in His providential government men should hear His voice; that they should reap the widespread sorrow which is only the harvest of their departure from God. But how solemn must be the condition of Christendom which makes such a catastrophe, so far — reaching and overwhelming, a necessity, for we may be sure that if anything less than this would have been enough to awaken men from their sinful indifference to God, and to awaken Christians also from their selfish slumbers, this would not have been permitted, for God is full of mercy.

After long patience God in His governmental ways has drawn a sword upon the nations, and said, "Sword, go through the land" (Ezek. 14: 17). Every professedly Christian nation is directly or indirectly involved in this terrific conflict, the end of which no man can foresee. It has touched all from the highest to the lowest, believers and unbelievers, involving millions in sorrow, ruin, desolation, and death.

And in the midst of all this sorrow where can the Christian find relief? To whom can the Christian turn? To the world? Alas there is no hope there! To the Christians in the world? Alas there is little hope there! To whom then can we turn? To GOD alone; "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in ME is thine help" (Hosea 13: 9). God remains, and with God there is no change. "Thou remainest," and "Thou art the Same."

The world looks to its millions and its munitions, its armies and its navies, to end the war. Let the Christians wait on God, that His end may be reached: "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from Him" (Ps. 62: 5). Let us look beyond all second causes, and accept this terrible discipline from God: "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos 3: 6).

Let us confess our failure, and seek that there may be, by the Spirit, a great revival in the hearts of God's people, and then let us pass on, and, pleading the mercy of God, send up a united cry for peace in the world. As Christians we have failed greatly, but our failure does not lessen our responsibility to cry to God that souls may receive eternal blessing, and that peace may be restored and maintained while God's people are yet in the world.

When the people of God were in captivity, the Lord sent them a message by Jeremiah, saying, "Seek ye the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace" (Jer. 29: 7). The people who were thus told to pray were a failing people. The city they were told to pray for was a doomed city. Nevertheless they were to pray. We might think it hardly decent for such people to pray for others, and quite useless to pray for such a city. But no I for while the Lord fully recognizes the shame of His people, and that His hand was upon them in judgment, for He says, "I have caused you to be carried away captive," and yet He continues, "Pray unto the Lord for the city," for His mercy is very great.

It is our responsibility and privilege to make "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving thanks . . . for all men; for kings, and for all in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all piety and gravity," and above all that the gospel may be proclaimed in accordance with the desire of God our Saviour, "who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2: 1-6).

May the Lord turn the hearts of all His people to Himself, in individual as well as in united prayer, and intercession, for "who knoweth if He will return and repent and leave a blessing behind Him?" (Joel 2: 14). The rulers of this world know how to leave sorrow and the curse behind them, this the widows and the orphans, the ruined and the broken-hearted can rise up to tell: but God — God alone — out of all this woe can leave a "blessing behind Him." And when this present misery shall for ever have passed away, like some evil dream, will not many a soul look back to this sad time,

"And bless the hand that guided,
And bless the heart that planned
When throned where glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land"?