

WHO IS HE THAT CONDEMNETH?

"No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord." – Isa. 54:17.

WHAT A HERITAGE! What would one not give, sacrifice, to have this assurance which pertains not only to the life which now is, but goes far beyond, lays hold upon and blesses the eternal interests of all who attain this heritage. It is not applicable to one individual alone, but as declared, it belongs to all the servants of the Lord – every true spiritual Israelite may claim it, rest upon it and rejoice in it.

Our text may to some extent be applicable to regathered and re-favored Israel after the flesh, in the near future when the Lord will fulfil to them all his good promises; but without question it belongs to spiritual Israel – new creatures in Christ Jesus, joint-heirs with him of the Abrahamic promises as the seed of Abraham. – Gal. 3:29.

Spiritual Israel may sometimes feel as our Lord himself expressed the matter, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and may not always realize the object and necessity for some of the experiences through which the Lord permits Zion as a whole, and each individual Christian as her members or children, to pass; they may see that at times the Lord has apparently permitted the great adversary or his deluded servants to forge against them grievous weapons of destruction, and to assail them in health or in their social peace or financially; sometimes these weapons of the adversary have seemed to do terrible execution against them, and many may wonder how the Lord's good promise of our text is being fulfilled: "No weapon that is formed against her shall prosper."

Many tongues have arisen against the Lord's Zion as a whole and against each member individually – tongues laden with the "poison of

asps", tongues bitter with envy, malice, hatred and strife, – tongues which hesitate not to slander and misrepresent, to say all manner of evil falsely. And to a large extent these weapons and tongues have succeeded, have wrought havoc with the sheep, as also with the Shepherd; and God permitted it – he neither stopped the weapon nor stilled the tongue; and yet he assures us apparently to the contrary of this in our text. What is the true explanation of this situation?

The explanation is that "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the spirit of God dwell in you" – ye are "new creatures" in Christ Jesus, "old things are passed away, behold all things have become new." (Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 5:17.) The weapons and tongues attempt to assail us as new creatures, but fail of this and merely do injury to the old creature – to the flesh, which we have already consecrated to death anyway. By helping to kill or to mortify the flesh, our adversaries are really helping us as "new creatures" instead of hindering us as designed. God thus turns what seems to harm us into everlasting joy and blessing.

The context bears out this thought, declaring, "All **[R3051 : page 231]** thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children." (v. 13.) Ah yes, these spiritual sons of God need the instructions of the Lord's Word in order to understand his dealings – in order to enable them to have the great peace here predicted. God's children in the school of Christ learn not their lessons all at once, but gradually, "Line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little," by degrees they come to comprehend the exceeding great and precious promises of the Father's Word which unite in declaring that under his supervision "All things shall work together for good to them that love God – to the called ones according to his purpose"; this is a sufficiency for the beginning of faith and, therefore, a sufficiency for the beginning of the peace. As our instruction progresses we learn the philosophy of our experience – that by the trials and vicissitudes of this present life, by our warfare with the world, the flesh and the devil, by our strivings in this battle, we are

forming characters in accord with righteousness; and, additionally, we learn that God seeketh such characters, and is thus developing us because he has for the world in general a great and wonderful plan of salvation not yet fully made known, in which he desires that the "elect" Church of this Gospel age shall be co-workers, joint-heirs with their Lord and Redeemer, as the royal priesthood under him, their Head, – the great Prophet, Priest and King so long promised, whose work shall be to overthrow the powers of evil, to bind the Adversary, to lift up and enlighten the world of mankind and to grant to every redeemed child of Adam a full, gracious opportunity of return to the Father's favor through obedience and restitution.

When once the eyes of our understanding are opened to appreciate the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of our Father's plan, we see that the world of mankind are not in torture and hopeless misery, but are in the great prison house of death; we see that our Lord Jesus has by the grace of God tasted death for every man; and we see that it is on the strength of this redemption for the whole world by the one sacrifice of sin that the promise has gone forth that all shall be brought to a knowledge of the truth that they may be saved. From this standpoint everything becomes new; old fears and perplexities pass away, and the light of the knowledge of the goodness of God shining into our hearts, becomes more and more a transforming power therein, – changing us from glory to glory. And if we continue in this way it will eventually fit us for participation with our Redeemer in all this glorious Millennial work. We see that it is because of God's desires to have us thus members of his "elect" Church that he has favored us in advance of the world with the knowledge of his goodness and redeeming love, and that he has anointed us with his spirit and called us to this high, heavenly calling. Praise his name!

As the teaching of the Lord to the Church belongs to the present time, so does the peace of those who are taught apply in the present time, and is in proportion to our readiness to receive instruction and come to a knowledge of God. Those who instructed by the divine

Word have reached a large degree of knowledge of the divine character through the divine plan, may, should, must have the peace of God which passeth all understanding, ruling in their hearts. If they have not the peace they cannot have the joy of the Lord; and if they have not this, even under the present trying circumstances and conditions, it is because they have not been sufficiently taught of the Lord; and if they have been long in the school of Christ without this attainment, it is an evidence that they have not been giving the proper earnest heed to the Word, – it is an evidence that they have been following the traditions of men rather than inquiring for the old paths, the way of the Lord. Let us all take heed lest we let slip those things which we have heard, remembering that the earthen vessels in which we have the treasure of the new mind are leaky, and that this necessitates our keeping near to the fountain spring – near to the Lord, near to his Word and, hence, near to all others who are close to the Lord and to his Word.

The context further declares respecting this class under consideration, "In righteousness shalt thou [the godly] be established; thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near thee." (vs. 14.) This also applies to the present life and not to the life of glory. Those who are not established in righteousness now will not be accounted worthy to be sharers in the first resurrection, respecting which it is written, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection." Righteousness, justice, must be the foundation of every character acceptable to God: as justice is the foundation of the Lord's throne, so it is the foundation of all with which he has to do; and if we are his it must be the sub-stratum of our Christian character. We must learn to be just before we are generous; we must learn that while love may call for sacrifices, duty, obligation calls for justice first. In the blindness and darkness which came to us from the dark ages, before the anointing of our eyes with the eyesalve of truth from the words of the Lord and his apostles – when in our blindness we conceived of God as unjust and unloving because of misrepresentation of his plan, we had so low an ideal before our minds

that we found it easy to excuse injustice or cruelty or selfishness, since, according to our false standard and misconceptions of God, he was the exemplar of all this. The Lord undoubtedly had mercy upon us on account of our ignorance and blindness; but now since he has opened the eyes of our understanding, has shown us his own justice and his own boundless love, and since we are seeking to copy these, there is no longer room for us to excuse unrighteousness or injustice in our hearts. It may require time to bring every word and act and thought into harmony with the new mind instructed from the Word; – we may never succeed to our own satisfaction in this matter in our present life, because of the weaknesses of the flesh through which our wills must operate; but we can at least make strong effort, and by the Lord's assisting grace [R3051 : page 232] accomplish great things in righteousness, not only of intention, but in righteousness of thought, of judgment, of conduct.

This righteousness in which the Lord's children are to be established, is further explained by the statement, "Thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear." As we look back into the dark ages we see that it was full of oppression practiced in the name of the Lord and in the name of righteousness and in many cases, undoubtedly, practiced conscientiously. In all good conscience men oppressed one another because of their fears, their false theories declaring that the Lord was about to torture to all eternity all who did not accept a certain theory of belief, and it seemed to them the veriest kindness to inflict torture by thumbscrew, rack and stake for the correction of heretics – with a view to saving them possibly from an eternity of suffering; and with the view also to hinder them from misleading others to such an awful eternity. This oppression, this cruelty, was the result of fear, and the fear was the result of misunderstanding of God's character – because they were taught of men and not taught of the Lord, as the Prophet declares, "Their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men." – Isa. 29:13.

As the light of the truth comes into our hearts giving us a true knowledge of the Lord, instructing us as his children, perfect love casts out fear, and proportionately it casts out superstition and intolerance and oppression, as the Prophet here declares. The Lord's people are to love religious liberty for themselves and are correspondingly to grant the same to all others. "Thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear." This class will be anxious to set men free, not anxious to enslave them. On the other hand the declaration is, "Thou shalt be far from terror, for it shall not come near thee;" the Lord's people ought to be the most fearless people in the world as respects earthly disasters and calamities; taught of the Lord they have learned that there is only one being who needs to be feared – the one who has the power to destroy the soul. They do indeed fear to displease or offend him; and yet, having learned of his goodness, mercy and love, they do not fear him in the ordinary sense of the word, but rejoice in him, confide in him, trust him as a child trusts a father, and this confidence grows in proportion as they are taught of the Lord – in proportion as they learn to trust, both from the Word of the Lord and from his providences, his dealings with them.

The text further shows that there will be not only individual oppositions to be encountered, but that Zion as a whole will be assailed by foes; as we read, "Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by me; whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake." (vs. 15.) Wonderful words of consolation! We cannot at present judge to what extent this may have a fulfilment not many years hence, when there shall be a general gathering together of opponents to the truth and its servants. Already there have been various combinations instigated by the adversary, and they have all come to naught. They have really harmed none because it is impossible to injure the very elect. They have indeed caused the stumbling of some, and heartaches to many, yet, nevertheless, under the Lord's providence they have worked out deeper and richer experiences in all who were in the proper attitude of heart to be thus taught. **[R3052 : page 232]**

"Nearer my God to thee,
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me."

The assurance here given is nothing but what we might reasonably know when we consider the Lord's own declaration, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but shall accomplish that which I please, and shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." (Isa. 55:11.) So surely as our Heavenly Father has purposed the blessing of all the families of the earth through the seed of Abraham, just so surely it will be accomplished. And as the power of the Adversary raised against our Lord Jesus and the weapons formed against him, and which smote him down in death prevailed for a time, yet were merely so much of the outworking of the foreknown divine plan, so all of the machinations of the Adversary and the oppositions of the world and the flesh as well, cannot hinder the development of the various members of the body of Christ who, as the Heavenly Father has predicted, are to be joint-heirs with his Son in the Millennial Kingdom of blessing.

The Word of the Lord declares that even those who crucified the Master, and who, in their conscientious conviction that they were doing right, said, "His blood be upon us and upon our children" – these are all yet to be the subjects of divine mercy in due time; because as the Apostle Peter declares that they did it "through ignorance." (Acts 3:17.) The Lord foretells the time that they shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and shall all mourn because of him; and he foretells, too, that at that time so far from crushing them or torturing them, he will favor them by pouring upon them the spirit of prayer and supplication. – Zech. 12:10.

It is a different matter, however, when those who "have been enlightened and have tasted of the good Word of God and of the powers of the age to come and have been made partakers of the holy spirit," shall become accusers of the brethren, adversaries, persecutors. No blessings are promised to these; but the declaration is that "It were

better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea." Judas was an ensample of this class in his day; of him the Master said in love and in sorrow, – not in anger, – "It were better for that man had he never been born" – his life has been more than wasted. It is not our thought that the Lord will have torments for these in the future, but rather that they die the Second Death, and that in some manner they receive retribution in the present life as did Judas.

But he that is one of the Lord's people, possessed by his spirit, could not be a persecutor or opponent of the brethren, – none surely except those who become poisoned with the adversary's covetous disposition, **[R3052 : page 233]** with the desire for self-exaltation. No wonder that the Lord cautioned us against this sin of covetousness under which Satan originally fell, by which Mother Eve was seduced from loyalty to the Lord, and by which Judas and various other enemies of the Lord have been misled. Let us be more and more on guard against it. Let others do what they will – whatever the Lord may permit – as for us, let us say with the Apostle, "we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth" – all of our energies and powers must be enlisted on the side of the Lord and on the side of all those who are his. Not a finger dare we move, not a whisper dare we utter injurious to the members of the body of Christ, of whom the Lord declares, "No weapon formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgement, shalt thou condemn."

WHO IS HE THAT CONDEMNETH?

The closing words of our text remind us of the language of the Apostle (Rom. 8:31-39), "If God be for us, who can be against us?" – who can prosper against us, who can accomplish anything against us? That God is for us is already manifested in that he spared not his own Son, but redeemed us with his precious blood; and in that he has called us in Christ Jesus to be his "elect" Church, his Bride. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." In harmony with this, our text declares of these servants of the Lord,

"Their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord." Some may endeavor to condemn them and may indeed succeed in finding fault with them for having imperfect judgments, and being sometimes imperfect in their conduct or words; but what will it matter that such should condemn those whom the Lord approves? The Lord informs us that he knows our imperfections better than any could know them; but that of his own grace he has provided a covering for our unintentional blemishes through the merit of the sacrifice of his Son. Who then shall succeed in condemning these whom God approves, whom God justifies, whom God declares to be right and acceptable to him through Jesus Christ? Others may claim that they are actually as nearly perfect as some of the faithful "elect," but the difference is that whereas God must reject all to any degree blemished, these have the covering of his Grace in Christ and are accepted according to their intentions and endeavors; and, therefore, they shall be able to stand, for he is able to make them stand in their testing or judgment. – Rom. 14:4.

Let us as members of the house of Sons, accepted in the Beloved, take from our Father's Word in this text the strong consolation which he intends it should give us. Let our faith triumphantly sing, and our joy and rejoicing in the Lord know no bounds. According unto our faith it will be unto us. But while it will be on account of our faith that the Lord will approve of us, accept us, and bless us, he has, nevertheless, assured us in advance that where the tree of faith exists and grows, the character development, the fruitage of the faith will surely also abound, and that thus by our works (imperfect though they be) we shall give evidence of the faith that is in us. Such a living faith may well cause rejoicing in the house of our pilgrimage, with this assurance that even the machinations of our enemies shall work out for us blessings, under our Heavenly Father's supervising care, wisdom, love and power.

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