

The Battle of Conquerors (11)

—G. H. Elbers

Chapter 14

"Stand therefore, having girt about your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and shod your feet with the preparation of the glad tidings of peace: besides all these, having taken the shield of faith with which ye will be able to quench all the inflamed darts of the wicked one. Have also the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word; praying at all seasons, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:14-18).

The next 'piece' of the armour is: the helmet of salvation. We all know very well that a helmet is meant for protection. It is at any rate not a piece with which to attack, but it is a part of the ensemble meant for standing firm in the spiritual battle.

What Does a Helmet Protect?

The helmet is placed on the head, the seat of our thoughts. When we forge plans, when we take action (or do not), all begins with our thoughts. That place certainly needs protection because our thoughts are the target of the enemy! We need to understand this fact well!

There is a saying: 'The idle brain is the devil's workshop.' How true this is of the believer's brain as well as the unbeliever's! When there is emptiness, the devil is all too eager to fill the gap with thoughts that are wrong, unclean, or fruitless. According to Ephesians 4:17, the Gentiles walk in vanity (or fruitlessness) of their thoughts. And their thoughts are directed towards their self-centered "I," that is, their own well-being and happiness, apart from God. They believe that their methods, their manners, their efforts, can present solutions for worldwide problems. These thoughts are indeed fruitless, as we can observe all around us. Never has a permanent solution been found for the great problems of the world. Nor can it be.

So, the devil surely likes to fill our thoughts with wrong doctrines that most of the time appear reasonable, wise, and intelligent. As long as we are occupied with other things than matters of faith, he can do what he wants — even deceive us.

Be warned: we have received the armour to be able to stand against the wiles of the devil (6:11).

But What Is Salvation?

Now let us look up some places in God's Word where we find that word 'salvation.' Doing so, we will discover how tremendously important salvation is for every person: believer and unbeliever. Salvation keeps the believer standing, and gives the unbeliever peace with God.

First, for the proper order, I want you to note that the words 'salvation', 'deliverance', 'redemption', 'health' are all derived from the Greek *soteria* or *soterion*. These words, used in the original, mean: *deliverance* or *the securing of safety*, as the following passages show.

1. For the grace of God which carries with it salvation for all men has appeared (Tit. 2:11)
2. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples (Lk. 2:31)
3. All flesh shall see the salvation of God (Lk. 3:6).
4. Today salvation is come to this house (Lk. 19:9).
5. Be it known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the nations, they also shall hear it (Acts 28:28).
6. The glad tidings... is God's power to salvation, to every one that believes (Rom 1:16).

When we carefully analyze these verses, we see that God in His grace has sent deliverance and salvation:

for all men Titus 2:11

all peoples	Luke 2:31
all flesh	Luke 3:6
the individual	Luke 19:9
the nations	Acts 28:28
everyone	Romans 1:16

This means, therefore, that God's salvation is also available for us — for me! That is a happy, reassuring thought! Nothing — no one — can take away the salvation provided by the Lord Jesus. It has come from God and is therefore (reverently spoken) of first-class quality.

Battle!

But then again: as soon as the devil sees that there is something for which we want to thank the Lord, he tries to squelch our gratitude. When he discovers that we desire to live to the glory of God because of the salvation we have received, the enemy of God and men seeks to disrupt this by enticing us with temptations and wiles so we will have impure thoughts and fruitless ideas. He sows doubt in any way he can to divert our attention from the Lord Jesus.

This, too, is a part of the spiritual battle! Since our thoughts determine our actions, the devil will seek to influence our thoughts, so that he may rule over us.

Now the question is (and please let us ask it prayerfully of ourselves!): What really controls our, my, thoughts? Remember: 'An idle brain is the devil's workshop.'

Even Christians can become so occupied with the worthless things of the world that these things fill all their thoughts. Then there is no place for the Lord. Even though they have become a new creation by their conversion, they can backslide by failing to be occupied with God's Word, by failing to go to meetings, or by failing to fellowship with other Christians. Thus, a kind of vacuum grows in their thoughts, an empty place, that the devil is all too eager to fill.

And What About Me?

Now we should not talk just about "other" Christians, for that way we exclude ourselves from these tests. Let us first look at what fills and occupies our own thoughts. To do so, let us look at some very ordinary things, such as: sports, health, politics, the past, the future, our career, well-being, friendship. In themselves these things are not necessarily wrong! But the moment that they begin to rule our thoughts, danger lurks around the corner. Remarkably, Paul wrote to the Philippians that they, by making their desires known to God with prayer and supplication, would receive the peace of God. Philippians 4:7 speaks even about a peace that keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. How often are our hearts filled with countless matters, including those previously mentioned, while our thoughts are empty of things concerning the Lord!

These matters can become such an obsession that we become stressed out or we begin to forget that salvation has come from God.

The words "And take the helmet of salvation" (Eph. 6:17) tell us that God has given us a means whereby our thoughts are protected. *The literal Greek text says that with joy we [ought to] accept [the fact] that deliverance (salvation) has taken place.* When we do this, our thoughts will be influenced by our salvation, and we will be able to withstand the attacks of the devil.

Saying 'No' is Not Difficult

Suppose you received a million dollars yesterday, and you are asked to steal a T-shirt today. You are so filled with the great gift and so overcome by your sudden richness that without any difficulty you can say, 'No,' against the temptation to steal!

But now, suppose you are occupied with the salvation that has become yours through God's love and the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross. That surely is of far greater value than a mere million! Now suppose that at that moment the devil would whisper in your ear, suggesting you enter into a wrong friendship, buy a dirty magazine, lie to another, or whatever

it may be. Now, is it hard to say, 'No,' to that temptation? You see, salvation works as a protector of your thoughts. That is why God has added this piece to the armour.

During the war a large number of soldiers lost their lives because they failed to put on their helmet (which they always carried with them!). Now you know better. And... 'Once warned...'

Chapter 15

"Stand therefore, having girt about your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and shod your feet with the preparation of the glad tidings of peace: besides all these, having taken the shield of faith with which ye will be able to quench all the inflamed darts of the wicked one. Have also the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word; praying at all seasons, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." (Ephesians 6:14-18).

Here, for the first time, we have a real weapon for attack! No pieces of the armour mentioned earlier were for attack. All those mentioned until now were for defense. Are we then to attack after all?

No! We must again cling to our starting point found in Ephesians 6:11 and 13. We must stand! That is, we must remain at the place where and in the condition in which God has brought us.

It is therefore definitely a matter of warfare, yet the believer is not to attack! Don't forget: for the Christian, the battle has already been fought, and the Lord Jesus is the great Conqueror.

A Sword for Defense

If we want to know what is meant by 'the sword' we must look at the original text. As we know, this part of the Bible was originally written in the Greek language in the time and culture in which Paul lived. The '*machaira*' (think of a machete). can be compared to a short, strong broadsword — not an offensive weapon, but a weapon meant for close up fights, man to man. Thus, it really is a defensive weapon! We must emphasize this aspect because so many (especially young) Christians feel unhappy because they think they must *fight* to lead a victorious life, and they experience that they so badly lack power. But believers may rest in and enjoy the results of the work of the Lord Jesus, who fought the battle for us. That is something entirely different! He is Conqueror! We are conquerors through and with Him (Rom. 8:37). The sword is only to repel Satan's attack. Yes, there is a battle, very much so!

...of the Spirit and...of God!

Now we come to one of the more important points of the whole armour. We must consider this verse word by word! For it speaks of the sword *of the Spirit* and *of the Word of God* — not just of any sword, or just any word. That is a most important point, for we humans can cause so much damage when we use the Bible as any odd sword. All may seem to fit, but when God's Spirit does not control our lives, every action is a damaging sword-battle. The same holds true for the use of the Word. Paul wrote clearly about the Word *of God*. This means that we cannot simply say what we want.

In Matthew 4:1-11 we see a very clear example: The Lord Jesus was in the wilderness, where He was tempted by the devil. To put it simply: Satan attacked. Read that portion very carefully! You will see how Satan used the Word to tempt the Lord to sin. The devil even quoted in verse 6 a portion from the Old Testament (Ps. 91:11-12)! You see! The devil has a good knowledge of the Bible but... he never uses God's Word to bring man to God. To the contrary, he misuses it to draw men away. Was Satan led by God's Spirit when he quoted Scripture? Most certainly not!

Using the Sword!

How did the Lord Jesus respond to these tempting attacks of the devil? Did He begin a discussion? Did He compromise? Did He start a dialogue, as is the fashion these days? (You know... with our Muslim 'brothers,' Hindu 'brothers,' etc.)

No, the Lord used the weapon of which we are speaking, the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit. The Lord responded with God's Word to every temptation. Notice how He parried every attack with quotation from Scripture:

Matthew 4:4 — "it is written," — Deuteronomy 8:3

Matthew 4:7 — "it is again written" — Deuteronomy 6:16
Matthew 4:10 — "for it is written" — Deuteronomy 6:13

Here we find at least two important lessons. First we learn how the devil knows the Bible and... uses it. Secondly, the Lord Jesus knows the Scriptures and uses it. However, there is a great difference between the Lord's use of the Scriptures and the devil's use. There was only One who used that Word to the glory of God: God's Son! Therefore we should not be too quickly impressed when verses glibly roll off someone's tongue. We always have to ask ourselves whether the words we hear agree or don't agree with the rest of God's Word.

After all, the devil often disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). Many people (Christians too) are misled by nice pious-sounding words, because they do not investigate to prove that the words they hear are really true (Acts 17:11). They forget (sometimes out of a desire for ease) that the devil is really the father of lies.

Practice Makes Perfect

We know this saying. It holds as true for Christians as it does for the acrobats in a circus! And people who are in the martial arts know all too well that they must train, train, train if they want to succeed. Did you expect that it would be any different for the proper handling of a sword? No, it is exactly the same in that case. If we want to resist Satan, if we want to remain standing, then we must train in the use of the armour, and of the sword, in particular. By this I mean, of course, that we must learn to know the Bible in order to use it properly. One has no benefit from a sword that is dangling on the wall, or hidden under his bed, when he must suddenly have to ward off an attack. We must accept, then handle this God-given sword.

We will never become familiar with the Bible's contents if we leave our Bible on the shelf or under our pillow. We will succumb in the battle against the enemy. *The Lord Jesus could use the sword of the Spirit because He knew the Word of God well.* That is an important lesson for us all.

The Quality of the Sword

Can you imagine trying to shoot with a rifle when the barrel is limply hanging down? Or flying a fighter plane that can't go higher than the rooftops? Such battle equipment is good for nothing and guarantees the soldier will lose in the skirmish.

That is not how God deals with 'His people'! Ephesians 6:17 tells us that we ought to accept the *helmet* of salvation and the *sword* of the Spirit, the Word of God. What do you think God gives us? The very best, of course! God's Word is perfect, trustworthy, truthful, pure, true, righteous, precious (Ps. 19:8-11). It is a lamp and a light (Ps. 119:105). Peter described it as living and everlasting (1 Pet. 1:23), while Paul explained that the God-inspired Scriptural Word is also profitable for teaching, conviction, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). Such is the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit. Its quality is unequalled! Therewith we can (if we know it) resist the attacks of the wicked one.

When the Lord Jesus used the Word of God, Satan left Him, and lo the angels came and served Him... (Mt. 4:11).

Therefore, let us use this God-provided weapon. We're guaranteed to be spiritual winners!

To be cont'd

The Prophecy of Zephaniah (1)

—H. L. Rossier

No Distinction Between Israel and the Nations

The book Zephaniah has two distinct characteristics. The first is that the prophet does not, like other prophets, distinguish between Israel and the nations. Zephaniah announces namely the same judgment for both. Because they displayed the same traits of the corrupted man, in particular that of idolatry, the same judgment had to be meted out to them both.

The second characteristic is that God separates from the masses those He wants to save. Thereby a *remnant of Israel* is called into existence. Zephaniah did not speak of a remnant out of the nations (or rather: in chapter 2:8-10 he only

touches on it in passing), although this remnant is also part of God's plan for the future. Other prophets, however, have mentioned particularly the restoration of the prisoners of Moab and Ammon, of Elam and Egypt, that is to say, the formation of a remnant out of these nations that will share in the restoration during the last days (Jer. 48:47; 49:6,39; Ezek. 29:14).

Zephaniah only announces that, although Israel will receive the same judgment as the nations, God in His grace will bring forth a new people out of this judged nation. The formation of it, and the promises of never-ending blessings, give this book a stamp of extraordinary freshness.

The Formation of a Remnant

The remnant will be the fruit of a revival in the midst of the unbelieving nation. Revivals never stop the ruin, they never change in any way the condition of the masses, as we have already expounded in other writings. God has two purposes in view when He brings about a revival. The first is the raising up of a testimony; this renders man even more guilty when he rejects it. The second is, as we have already seen, the setting apart of a certain number of faithful believers who have served the Lord in the midst of the decline and general apostasy, with an eye to establishing a new people in the future. The fruit of the revival thereby becomes the "trunk," the origin of *the people of God*. God's loving care will concentrate itself on this remnant; *He* will keep it in the midst of the Great Tribulation, the terrible time of "Jacob's trouble." *He* will separate it from the apostate nation that is destined for destruction.

Finally, this remnant will display the characteristics of the future nation that will be "willing," and it is said of it: "In holy splendour: from the womb of the morning shall come to thee the dew of thy youth" (Ps. 110:3). The remnant, initially small and despised, will increase in number and become innumerable as the stars in the heavens and as the sand at the seashore. This nation will surround the throne of the great King at Jerusalem and have dominion over all other nations. From among the latter ones, a crowd that no one can number (Rev. 7) will through faith subject itself to Christ's millennial reign. Another part, which has not been consumed at Christ's appearing, will only subject themselves to Him in a "dissembling" way (Ps. 18:45; 66:3). They will be destroyed at the revolt of Satan when he, after the end of the Millennium, will be released from his prison (Rev. 20:7-9).

It will not be so with Israel, for by means of the remnant "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:26). Each morning the wicked among them will be destroyed from the land (Ps. 101:8), for the Millennium is not the *eternal* day in which all will be perfect.

We have just said that the formation of a remnant is always the result of a revival. So will this remnant in Jerusalem be formed in the midst of the Jewish people that has by then returned in unbelief to Palestine (Dan. 12:10). It is remarkable that Zephaniah, who mentioned this remnant only, was called to prophesy during the last revival of the nation mentioned in the Word, namely the revival under the kingship of Josiah.

The Power and Coming of the King

If Zephaniah, as is often assumed, was from royal descent, he must have been a descendant of Hezekiah. During Josiah's reign, the revival of Hezekiah's days was renewed, and Zephaniah was the instrument to make the *prophetic* revival known which would result in the formation of the remnant among the ancient people of God. The reveille under Josiah sprang up when the book of the Law was discovered. In it Josiah read that the wrath of God had been poured out over the nation because their fathers had "not kept the Word of Jehovah, to do according to all that is written in this Book" (2 Chr. 34:21). Then the king went to inquire of the Lord for himself, and "for them that are left in Israel and in Judah." Huldah, the prophetess, announced the curse of God over Jerusalem, but added that Josiah, as head of the remnant, would be spared (2 Chr. 34:23-28). Therefore, we have in Josiah a type of the faithful remnant of Israel in a future day, which forms the main topic of the book of Zephaniah.

The last revival will have as its purpose the preparation of the heart and conscience of the remnant for Christ's reign as King of Israel. Thus, Zephaniah presents the Lord in this character only: "The King of Israel, Jehovah, is in the midst of thee" (ch. 3:15).

In this prophecy — in contrast to other prophets such as Isaiah, Zechariah, Micah, and others — there is no mention of the atoning sufferings of the Messiah and the glory that should follow (1 Pet. 1:11), but rather of the power and coming of the King (2 Pet. 1:16), the Conqueror and Triumphator, who, after He has delivered His beloved people, will find all His joy in them.

Therefore Zephaniah mentions three facts that are directly related to each other:

1. The unrighteousness and idolatry of Israel and the nations, and the judgment that will come over all of them together. For apostate Israel, however, that originally was separated from the idolatrous Gentiles, the judgment will be considerably heavier.
2. The formation of a remnant according to the election of grace.
3. The remnant, that becomes the true Israel, united under the scepter of the *King and Messiah*.

The Day of the Lord

There are yet other traits that characterize this prophecy: with a view to the judgment, Zephaniah spoke from beginning to end about *the day of the Lord*.

Often this day is shown to have a partial fulfillment in history (see e.g. Joel 1). Here it was seen, as it were, at the terrible attack of Nebuchadnezzar. Yet, no matter how terrible this judgment might have been, it was but a weak picture of the day of the Lord. Babel, the executor of this past judgment, is not even mentioned in Zephaniah. This is because the prophet had the final judgment in view, and not, like Habakkuk, the attitude of the just who live by faith during the time of the historical judgment. For Zephaniah, the day of the Lord was first of all a *prophetical* day in which the Lord Himself will judge rather than use instruments for His wrath as He had done before. Therefore the name of the Chaldean is not mentioned in Zephaniah's prophecy although it was, historically, the only nation that executed judgment over Philistea, Ammon, Moab, the Assyrian, and finally over Jerusalem.

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus calls the day of the Lord "the day of the coming of the Son of man." It will be a day of judgment and revenge. The day of Christ does not mean the same, for believers expect that day as the day of His appearing. In the fear of the Lord, they can love that day and plead for it without being afraid for it (cf. Hab. 2:3; 3:16; 2 Tim. 4:8).

To love His appearing means living in the hope that we will share in His glory, receiving His approval when He hands out crowns to His own. Then His faithful witnesses, standing before the judgment seat, will hear these blessed words: "Well done, thou good and faithful bondman... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Mt. 25:21 KJV). The day of the coming of the Son of man concerns the world, the day of Christ the believers. Doubtless it is the same day, but seen from two sides. The one side points to those who are cast out, and to darkness, the other to the elect, and to the full light of God's presence.

In Zephaniah, Jerusalem takes, as the birthplace of the remnant, the first place during the restoration, although Judah and the ten tribes are also mentioned. But because to Zephaniah *the remnant and the people* are one and the same, he only speaks of the remnant. Zephaniah never uses the words, "My people," so often found with other prophets. However, the unbelieving part of the nation is called "the people without shame." These introductory remarks will be of help in understanding the details of this Book more easily.

To be cont'd

Were the Old Testament Believers United with Christ?

—H. Bouter

Observations about Israel, the Assembly, Covenant, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper

Recently someone confronted me with the above question. The so-called Covenant-Theology, generally answers this question affirmatively, placing the accent on Creation and the Fall, and then on the "Covenant of Grace" that God supposedly would have made with fallen man. Because of its vision of one covenant and one 'Church,' wherein Israel is identified with the Church, this reformed line of thought bears strongly the stamp of the Old Testament. As a result, it actually does not make too much of a difference to the adherents of this theology whether one lived before or after the coming of Christ. All would share in the same blessing, possess the same position, and share the same inheritance. But is this correct? Would it not make a difference whether we lived prior or after the Lord's coming? Scripture teaches differently.

Redemption by Christ, His death and resurrection, as well as His ascension and all that flows from it, form the *real core* of Scripture and of salvation's story. Consequently, this is decisive for our position as believers. The Old Testament saints were no 'Christians,' believers in the New Testament sense of the word (although Old Testament and New Testament saints have many essential features in common, such as repentance, forgiveness, and such).

True, believing Israelites longed for the coming of the Messiah. Some, like Abraham, who full of joy, looked forward to seeing the day of Christ (Jn. 8:56), even got a glimpse of His future glory. Similarly we read in 1 Peter 1:10-12 about the testimony of God's Spirit in the men who wrote the Bible. The things that they presented regarding Christ's suffering and glory are only now presented in the gospel. Only now are they given effect in the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

This longing of the Old Testament believers for the coming of the Messiah, this expecting of His day, does not mean, however, that they were already united with Christ. Or that they, just as we, would have been members of Christ's body (Eph. 1:22-23) on earth. Christ had not yet come to earth, had He? He had not yet finished the work of redemption; the Holy Spirit had not yet been given on earth. How then could these Israelites have been united to Him, while He had not even come yet? Let alone that they would be united to a heavenly Christ, i.e., a glorified *Man* in heaven!

These are all New Testament blessings, and this holds true too for the abiding indwelling of the Spirit in the believer, for "the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified" (Jn. 7:39). The Comforter proceeded from the Father and from the glorified Christ after His return to heaven (Jn. 14-16). Of Old Testament saints it can only be said that they hoped for Christ. There could only be mention of being united with Christ after His death and resurrection. In this connection it is also helpful to consider Christ's own remarks about the corn of wheat that remained alone and had to fall into the earth and die if it was to bear fruit (Jn. 12:24; see also Isa. 53, especially v. 10).

Not from Adam on, or from the beginning of the 'covenant of grace,' but from the day of Pentecost Christ is building His Church by means of the gathering work of the Holy Spirit. That is how He Himself has announced it: "On this Rock (*petra*, i.e., the risen Christ, the Son of the Living God) I will build My Church" (Mt. 16:16-18 KJV). Therefore, the Church is not just a continuation of Israel. The link between the Old- and New Testament people of God is simply not referred to in the Bible. The differences are greater than the similarities, and the Church is something entirely new. It has not been incorporated into Israel, but all believers out of Israel and the nations form now together the 'body' of the glorified Lord in heaven. Incorporation into this body, into this redeemed Church does not take place by means of water baptism (so often considered to be the counterpart of the circumcision), but by baptism with the Holy Spirit. A careful reading of 1 Corinthians 12:13 will make this clear: "For also in the power of one Spirit we have all [out of Israel and from among the nations] been baptized into one body." The Spirit's personal indwelling in the Christian is the link with the heavenly Christ, our Head, who is above.

Water baptism, on the other hand, has to do with our position on earth. We have been immersed in the death of Christ and therewith we have left the old world which lies under judgment to place ourselves in the new resurrection world under the authority of the risen Lord, and to walk in the future in newness of life (Rom. 6; 1 Cor. 10; 1 Pet. 3). The children of believers do not belong to the 'body' as we have just described it; they are, however, in the light of Word and Spirit. They belong to the people of God in a more expanded sense. Due to this, they are addressed in the New Testament Epistles as to their responsibility towards their parents. Jesus blessed the children and promised them the kingdom, but He did not baptize them! Also in 1 Corinthians 7:14, in referring to the special place of children, there is no mention of baptism. Their special place stems from their link to their believing parent(s) and the sanctifying influence that flows therefrom, not from water baptism (which is a sign of this special position provided it is accompanied by true faith). Water baptism cannot transform people into members of the new people of God, destined for heaven. Nor does water baptism incorporate us into the body of Christ, for this only takes place through baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Baptism by water has indeed an important place, or more correctly put, faith that causes one to desire to be baptized. For "he that *believes* and is baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:16). Then follows the Lord's Supper, which gives expression to the unity of the 'body' of Christ. For, "we, being many, are one loaf, one body" (1 Cor. 10:17). That 'body' was unknown in the Old Testament. True enough, the Old Testament believers had life from God which was given them in anticipation of the work of Christ. They did not, however, possess this life to the rich degree as is now true of the sheep of Christ: eternal life, knowledge of the Father and of the Son (who has come down to earth and returned to heaven), life in abundance (see Jn. 10 and 17).

The Church does not just share in all spiritual blessings of the new covenant promised to Israel, it possesses much more. Specific New Testament blessings are: to be a member of the body of Christ, and to be a member of the family of God's children. These blessings go further than the covenant privileges. For the heavenly Head of the body does not enter into covenant relationships with His members. They are already joined together by a living link and no member can do

anything without the Head. And so it is with the second aspect. The Father does not make a covenant with His children, with the members of His household, the objects of His love, does He? A covenant is made with strangers or with enemies, but not with one's own children.

The Church is therefore 'better off' than Israel, although this does not mean that there are no similarities between these two 'peoples,' or that there are not common blessings they will share. Of course, Christ's sacrifice retrospectively applies to Old Testament saints, but this does not mean that Old and New Testament saints enjoy exactly the same position and blessings. As we said before, the Church has a unique position as the body of the glorified Head in heaven. That is the mystery that has been entrusted to Paul and which is revealed in his Epistles. In them it is a question of heavenly, spiritual blessings from before the foundation of the world, whereas Israel's portion has more to do with the earth and dates from the foundation of the world (cf. Eph. 1:4 with Mt. 25:34).

This distinction in election accentuates that it does not refer to the same people of God. The continuance is only in regard to the aspect that today the Church is God's testimony on earth, while Israel, which was that in the past, has been temporarily set aside (namely until the rapture of the Church). The doctrine of the Church and of the future are closely linked. The Greek word for 'Assembly' or 'Church' (*ekklesia*) is a very general word that is not only used collectively for the people in the desert (Israel), and for those called out from Israel and the nations (the Church), but just as well for the assembly of the Ephesians who were entitled to vote (See Acts 7:38; 5:11; 19:32).

The Church is by nature not an unplanned interim dispensation. Today we live in an interim — the period between Christ's coming in flesh and His return — in which God brings in His eternal counsels that had remained hidden in Old Testament times, and that far exceed His plans, His governmental dealings, with Israel and the world. After the rapture of the Church, God resumes His public ways with Israel, which will result in a direct government of God over the earth during the Millennium.

The Christian and Elections

—*The following article appeared first in 1880.*

That which hath been done is that which will be done: and there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl. 1:9).

By the time this meets the reader's eye, "the general election" will be past. Anything we have to say *now* can have no effect in *undoing* the part which, alas, not a few of God's children have taken in providing the world with one of its governments. Yet, it may be well to say a word or two on the subject.

The question as to whether a Christian should take part in the world's elections is happily one there need be no doubt about whatever: and when we say *Christian*, we mean "a born-again person." When we turn to the Word of God, we find God's children get no endorsement whatever to soil their fingers in the world's elections. Indeed, we are distinctly told that we are strangers and pilgrims here — we are not of the world — we are *one with Christ*; and we know what the world did with Him. As He is, so are we. The world was in such rebellion against God's Son that it murdered Him; and that rebellion is not a whit less than ever it was. The world is still the enemy of God, and ripening fast for judgment.

What is your place and mine in such a world? Is it to join hands with the ungodly and *have fellowship with them* in appointing a government for the very world that had no rest till it got Jesus "out of the land of the living"? Is our time come to *reign*? (1 Cor. 4:8). Some of God's children seem to think so; and they must have their hand in at making one of the world's governments, failing to see, or refusing to see, that "unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to *suffer*" (Phil.1:29 KJV). O how simple is God's Word! We are here to suffer — not *to reign*. We are in an enemy's country; and our position is that of despised ones — rejected ones, even as He was; for the disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord (Mt. 10:24). So far from identifying ourselves with the world, our life is to be in *contrast* with it.

We are to be in it as light in the midst of darkness — we are to be His witnesses, testifying, by life and lip, of *the Man Christ Jesus* (2 Pet. 1:19). We are not citizens of this world, as some imagine. Our *citizenship is in heaven* — *yonder* is our home — *yonder* is *our Man*, the elected of God: and during this time of His rejection we *wait for Him*. When He comes He will put all things right; and *then* we shall reign with Him. God's Book has it all laid down as clear as a sunbeam.

Of course, as is to be expected, Christians, who want to be *the friend of this world*, defend their concern in elections by many processes of *reasoning*. "But we're entitled to have as good a government as we can," they say. Certainly, we say,

and that is *by praying* for the powers that be (1 Tim. 2:1-2), and being subject to them (Rom. 13): that is all God says about it. "But," we are told, "if everybody were of your opinion, we would have no government." Exactly; and that would mean that the Lord Jesus would be here — that He had come whose right it is to reign. Others say, "Of course we're foreigners; but if a foreigner settles down and owns property, he takes his share in appointing rulers for the country he is in." Yes, we reply; but he there and then ceases to be a foreigner. This argument may suit those who have *settled down*; but we certainly never heard of a foreigner *settling down in an enemy's country*.

But no amount of reasoning can alter the plain Word of God — take its spirit or its letter; take it bit by bit, or as a whole, or any way you please. Whenever you go into the world's elections (be you a voter or not), you are where you cannot take God with you, and where His Word can only testify against you. Then, beloved, our path is clear; and it is simply to take *God's way*, and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. Let the world call us fanatics, or "righteous overmuch;" be it ours to rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for His name (Acts 5:41). Alas, that the children of God should be so easily baited from the top of the wall (Neh. 6:3) to engage in the world's battles! Where is the testimony for God in such a work? — where is the witness-bearing for Christ? — where the identity with the murdered Man? Only speak of Christ at one of these election meetings, and the world crushes you into a corner in a moment — you must not speak of Him. Alas! alas! and the Lord is at hand, and coming quickly; and see that Christian there rejoicing in the declaration of the *poll* — *rejoicing with the world that his man is in!*

But what if at that moment were to be heard the voice of the archangel and the trump of God (1 Th. 4:16)? and the absent One — the murdered Man — were to return? Oh, what then? Do we believe in the realities of eternity? or do we merely make a parade of them before the world at set times? Surely it is high time to awake out of sleep. Does not the world put us to the blush? Who among us are alive to the issues of eternity, as these men of the world are alive to the issues of their political contest? — and they for a corruptible crown, but we for an incorruptible (1 Cor. 9:25)! We may well take a leaf out of their book and press the claims of *our Candidate*, and the dread realities of judgment and eternity. Let the potsherds of earth strive with the potsherds thereof; but be it ours to have our loins girt about, and our lights burning, and we ourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord (Lk. 12:36); while we sail clear of everything that would quench the light of our testimony, or render dim, before the eye of a perishing world, the terrible truth that ere long the *rejected One* shall be revealed from heaven, with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, *taking vengeance on them that know not God* (2 Th. 1:8).

The Value of Hard Things

—A. B. Simpson

Hard things, trials, are valuable in revealing to us ourselves, and showing us our insufficiencies and failures. They are God's great blasting process in the work of spiritual excavation which is necessary for the work of building up our life and character. We never know ourselves until the test comes! Then the faith and courage that glowed with such a flame in the moment of enthusiasm and inspiration finds its true level, and the soul is thrown back in its nothingness and helplessness upon Christ alone, to find in Him its all in all.

Jacob's trials brought him to the end of self. Job's afflictions brought him to slay his self-righteous confidence. Peter's fall broke his pride and self-sufficiency and brought him to find his strength outside himself, in Christ alone. This is why the Lord still tries you, to thoroughly convince you that your estimate of your own strength is utterly false and exaggerated, and to bring you to where you can truly say, "No longer live I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

In bringing us trials and allowing us to get into hard places, God accomplishes for us far more than we may realize. Trials:

1. Teach us to know the resources of God;
2. Teach us faith;
3. Teach us to pray;
4. Teach us to love;
5. Teach us patience and courage, fitting us to help others.

Will we get out of the things that are happening to us all that God has for us? Will we "more than conquer through Him that has loved us" (Rom. 8:37)? And will we endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ? If so, we shall some day hear Him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant... enter into the joy of your Lord" (Mt. 25:21,23 KJV).

Trials Teach Us to Know the Resources of God

It is only in difficult circumstances that we learn the all-sufficiency of God. Israel at the Red Sea first had to stand still and behold the salvation of the Lord (Ex. 14:10-14). Likewise, He led them through a wilderness where natural supplies were lacking to teach them that He was adequate for every need.

God becomes real to us up to the measure of our sense of the *need* that He meets. So every difficult situation is just a vessel for Him to fill and an occasion for Him to show Himself in His infinite wisdom, power, and grace. God cuts and burns His messages into human lives until Christ becomes to us as real as the tears we have shed, the fears under which we have trembled, the sorrows that were ready to overwhelm us, and the difficulties which rose like mountains before us.

Trials make Christ just as real as the trouble is. Paul tells us that He was exposed to every sort of difficulty in order that the power of Christ might rest upon him according to his needs. Therefore he welcomed each new situation as another occasion for the Lord to say, "My grace suffices thee; for my power is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

Are we thus proving and finding Him equal to all the conditions of our lives and glorying in being able to tell the world that "God shall abundantly supply all [our] need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19)?

Trials Teach Us Faith

Trials are the fruitful soil of trust. Difficulties are the divine incentives that demand and develop our confidence in the faithfulness and love of God. The eagle can only teach her young to fly by stirring up her nest and hurling them out in mid-air where, thrown upon their own resources, they must either fly or fall. Then it is that they must learn the undeveloped power in their little wings. As they strike out upon the air in desperate struggles, they find the secret of a new life. They gradually learn to beat their way through the pathless skies and fly upon the wings of the wind.

So God teaches His children to use the wings of faith by stirring up their nests, taking away their props, and flinging them out oftentimes into an abyss of helplessness. There they must either sink or learn to trust that God is there beneath them like the supporting wing of the eagle stretches forth beneath her faint and struggling brood.

We tend to lean upon the things that we can see, and feel that it is an entirely new experience for us to stand alone and walk with the unseen God. But it is a lesson we must learn if our souls are ever to dwell in God's eternal calm where faith must be our only sense and God our all in all.

Very gently does He suit the test to our feeble strength and lead us on as we are able for more and more. Are we thus trusting Him in life's hard things and growing strong as we endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ?

Trials Teach Us to Pray.

Trials constrain us to be much alone with God. They drove Jacob to his knees at the fords of Jabbok (Gen. 32:23-30). They taught the Psalmist to find "the secret place of the Most High" (Ps. 91:1). They made the life of Paul one ceaseless dependence upon the presence of his Lord. And they have inspired as well as sustained the divine communion that we have learned to know as the supreme resource and solution of our lives.

It is very humbling to find that God must press his children to His breast by suffering and need. It is too often the case that ease and comfort lead us to at least a partial independence of Him. Our most spiritual seasons and the times that have brought God most near to us have been the times of which we could say, "Thou hast seen mine affliction; Thou hast known the troubles of my soul" (Ps. 31:7). As we experience God's sustaining grace, trials take away the fear of suffering and the dread of pain.

Trials Teach Us Love

God wants to answer our prayers, but He wants to soften and refine our spirits and teach us love. He has to let the discipline of ill-treatment, injustice, and even the severest wrong compels us to go to Him. Of course, we find that we have not the love adequate for the test and, as the Holy Spirit convicts us of our deficiency, He leads us to the source of love. Then as we gradually learn the humbling lesson, we are led into deeper testing and further refining to bring us more of His Spirit's grace and more of His own overcoming love.

Trials Fit Us to Help Others

Trials enable us to help others by the lessons we have learned in our own experience. For example, we can help others who need to be patient as a result of having ourselves learned patience by the trying of our own faith. Patience is the crowning grace of the Christian life; however, it is often learned only in the school of suffering. The painful ordeal of a really hard experience qualifies us to comfort, strengthen, and encourage the souls to whom the Lord sends us. To such we can say, "I have been there, and I can tell you from the depths of my own experience that 'God shall abundantly supply all your need' (Phil. 4:19). The callous or immature heart is little qualified to comfort and counsel those who are suffering in this world.

Also, our successfully passing through trials makes us object lessons for the help of others. We show what God can do for His children and what Christ-filled lives accomplish where others fail. God wants us to be living epistles of Christ (2 Cor. 3:3) written to all men, showing them by our example that He can keep in every situation, and that His supernatural power is practically adapted to every aspect of human life.

Trials successfully passed through lead to eternal blessing, for they present opportunities to earn rewards which will never pass away. The eternal results of our trials will shine in our lives in the glories of the coming age for which all things are now preparing.