

# Worldliness

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- Psalter 229:1,5
- Scripture: 1 John 2:1-20
- Text: 1 John 2:15-17
- Psalter 136
- Psalter 23:1-3,6
- Psalter 236

We wish to meditate today on 1 John 2:15-17: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For 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. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

With God's help, we wish to consider the theme of worldliness under four headings:

1. The essence of worldliness
2. The paths of worldliness
3. The curse of worldliness
4. The deliverance from worldliness

## **I. The essence of worldliness**

In the passage before us, the apostle John contrasts two loves: love for the world and love for the Father. These two loves are incompatible. They are mutually exclusive and cannot exist together. Either you love God or you love the world. You cannot love both. Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other” (Matt. 6:24). Today we are confronted with a strong warning from God's authoritative word: “Do not love the world or the things in the world!”

There should be one love that rules our life, one holy passion for God and the things of God. The choice is clear and directions are simple, but the way is not easy. The appeal of the world is strong and the flesh is weak. Jesus said, "Watch

and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." May God bless our consideration of this text, such that we pray earnestly that He would take away our love for the world and cause us to love only Him. We need God's grace for that; we cannot do that without the power of His Holy Spirit.

But why should we not love the world? John gives two critical reasons why we ought not love the world nor the things in the world. The first reason why we must not love the world is that the world is opposed to God.

To understand John's reasoning, we need to grasp his use of the word *world*. "World" in the New Testament is usually the Greek word *kosmos*. It is related to a verb that means "to set in order" or "to adorn or decorate," and has six basic meanings in New Testament usage:

- The universe created by God with design and order (Matt. 13:35)
- The planet earth (John 11:9) in contrast with heaven (1 John 3:17), that is, the world God created in six 24-hour days
- The total of mankind, or of all kinds of people such as both kings and subjects, Jews and Gentiles (Matt. 5:14; 2 Cor. 5:19)
- The total of human existence in this present life, with all of its experiences, possessions, and emotions (Matt. 16:26)
- The elect world of fallen people, who are the object of God's everlasting love and for whom Christ died (1 John 2:2)
- The world order or kingdom that is alienated from God, in rebellion against Him, and condemned by nature through the fall in Paradise and by actual sins in thoughts, words, and actions.

In this passage John is using the word world in the last and most common usage. He is not referring to the physical world in which we live or about the mass of people living on the planet. Rather, he uses the term world to refer to a kingdom, a realm and its inhabitants, that is lost in sin, wholly at odds with anything that is divine or pleasing to God. He is talking about Satan's kingdom of darkness which consists of all unsaved people who live according to the standards of this world. John Calvin defined the world in this sense as "everything connected with the present life, apart from the kingdom of God and the hope of eternal life."

Sometimes the New Testament writers also use the word *aion* for world, which

literally means "a segment of time, or an age." The New Testament repeatedly contrasts this age (this *aion*) with the age to come (the *aion* to come). When *aion* is used in terms of worldliness, it refers to this present age as a world immersed in sin and evil, a world separated from God, secularized, and demonized. Galatians 1:4 describes this age as an evil age. Evil is its dominant characteristic and the devil is its dominant agent. This present evil age is ruled by the devil under the rule of God. Paul calls Satan the god of this world--of this present age (2 Cor. 4:4). Therefore, Romans 12:2 tells us, believers are not to be conformed to this present age, but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds.

What then is the world, or worldliness, in the sense that John uses it in our text and as it is predominantly spoken of in the New Testament? When the word world - be it *kosmos* or *aion* - is used in the context of warning or divine judgment or as that from which believers have been delivered, it refers to man, his institutions, his surroundings, his goals, and his principles of thought and action as penetrated and controlled by immoral, malignant, devilish forces. This is the world that John tells us we are not to love.

John thus speaks of world in our text as antithetical to God. *World* here has an ethical, spiritual connotation that contrasts it with Christ and His church. This is the world which knows not God, nor His Son, but crucified the Lord of glory (John 1:10). John is referring to this present, evil world (John 8:23), as opposed to the other world, the heavenly world. This world, made to reflect the glory of God, now lives, post-fall, in sinister rebellion against the heavenly world. This world is now a fallen, disordered world, in the grip of the evil one, he says in 1 John 5:19. This world, despite its great achievements, is a lost world and is incapable of saving itself and ordering its existence in a meaningful, God-glorifying manner.

The world in this sense is the mass of mankind estranged from God through sin and living after the lusts of the flesh. This "world" is populated by sinful men, women, and children who think primarily of this world and neglect the world to come. Worldly people focus more on their bodies than their souls, more on pleasing men than pleasing God. They fear men more than God. They live more horizontally than vertically. Their motto is "forward," never "upward." Their goal is worldly success rather than divine holiness. They worship the creature rather

than the Creator. They lack reverence. They never bow in rapt, silent wonder in the secret place. They burst with selfish desires rather than heartfelt supplications. God may not be denied, but He is ignored and forgotten.

Worldliness, then, is human activity with God left out. Being of this world means being controlled by what preoccupies the world, the quest for pleasure, profit, and position. Worldliness means yielding to the spirit that animates fallen mankind, the spirit of self-seeking and self-indulgence without regard for God.

Every one of us, by nature, was born as a worldling. We have a native attachment to the world. We live in natural rapport with the spirit of the world. We belong to this evil world, to hell-bent humanity. The world is our native habitat and environment, our order and orbit of existence. We are part of the organized kingdom of the carnal mind which is enmity against God, and which is “not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). As much as we, after conception, were nourished in our mother's womb through an umbilical cord that attached us to her internal life support system, so we were born with an umbilical cord that tied us to the world's system. That was the womb of our fallen existence. Consequently, our understanding is darkened (Eph. 4:18) as we enter the world. The guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to us and the pollution of his sin is inherited by us. Our minds are blinded by the power of the devil (2 Cor. 4:4). Our baser passions and lusts are activated by the devil (Eph. 2:3). We are the disinherited sons of God, who have cast in our allegiance with the prince of this world. We are of our father, the devil. We live under the lordship of satanic powers. Sin lords itself over us; we are sinaholics. We live as slaves of sin (Rom. 6:16) in the service of human passions (1 Pet. 4:2). We give our members as weapons to the service of sin (Rom. 6:15). We are self-affirming, anti-God, tower of Babel builders, driven by pride, autonomy, and paranoia (Gen. 11:1-9).

We are all dead in sins and trespasses and are children of wrath (Eph. 2:1-2), until God graciously regenerates us and makes us true Christians (John 3:5). Only then are we set apart from the rest of mankind, called out of this sinful world to become a living member of the church and kingdom of God. Regeneration, or the new birth, divides the world into the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Those kingdoms always live in holy war with each other. They live in antithesis

rather than synthesis with each other.

The world is one of the three major enemies of the Christian. The other two enemies are the devil and the flesh. All three enemies work together to oppose God and God's people. If you are a true Christian, then you are at war with these enemies.

The devil is the supreme agent of evil, "the prince of this world" (John 12:31). He is the ultimate enemy of God and of the Christian, but he rarely attacks the believer directly. Instead, the devil works through the allurements of the world. First John 5:19 says that "the whole world lieth in wickedness," that is, in the grip of the evil one, Satan. This present evil world of people and things is under his sway and influence, with the sovereign permission of God. The world is a major weapon that the devil uses against believers.

We must not look at the evil world as something separate from the devil. We must learn to recognize that he is behind the scenes controlling the strings of all his subjects, just as a puppeteer controls his puppets. So he tries to control you and your actions as well.

We need to acknowledge that the world still has an attraction for the Christian. This is due to remaining sin in the believer, which the Bible calls the flesh. So then, while you must keep yourself "unspotted from the world," as James says, you must keep in mind that the sinful flesh is in league with the world. That is why isolation from the world, as was practiced by monks and mystics, does not keep you from sin. The truth is that we who are believers carry around a piece of the world within us. Just like the world, the flesh is completely opposed to God. As a Christian the part of you called the flesh is in agreement with the world and loves the world.

With the world, the devil, and the flesh against you, is there any hope for victory? Absolutely, for the victory was won when Jesus defeated Satan on the cross and rose again from the dead. In John 15:19 Jesus said, "Ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world." Because of His victorious death, and through faith in Him, you, dear believer, have been plucked from the kingdom of this world, and now belong to Christ and the kingdom of heaven. You were once a part of this world. You were born into it. But through Jesus Christ, you have

overcome the so-called evil trinity of the world, the flesh, and the devil. First John 2:13 says, "I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one."

In 1 John 5:4 we read, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." In Christ, by the Spirit's grace, you have overcome the world, but you must also fight a daily battle against the threefold temptations of the world. John says that there are three paths along which we are pulled into the ways of the world: (1) the lust of the flesh, (2) the lust of the eyes, and (3) the pride of life. Every one of us is drawn into the world by one or more of these three avenues, as I'll show in our second thought.

## **II. The paths of worldliness**

John becomes very specific in verse 16, "For 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." We must be specific, too, as we admonish one another of those evils from which we must separate ourselves. We can group these specifics under the three major paths of worldliness that John sets before us.

First, John warns against "the lust of the flesh." Love not a world, he warns, that delights in the lusts of the flesh.

Dear congregation, John's prohibition calls us to resist many temptations. We must never indulge in substance abuse, whether in the form of drugs or excessive drinking of alcohol. We must not overeat either. The Bible warns repeatedly against gluttony and drunkenness. We must discipline ourselves to control what enters our body, for it is the temple of the Holy Ghost.

Young people, don't befriend those who tempt you to drink or do drugs with them. Older friends, don't let your body and health degenerate because of a lack of diligence and discipline over what you eat. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

The prohibition against fleshly lusting also forbids sexual immorality in all its forms, whether in premarital, extramarital, or homosexual relationships. It forbids any physical intimacy outside the boundaries of marriage. God has wisely and lovingly placed sexual expression within the special, secure bond of marriage.

Premarital sex lacks the purity, exclusiveness, and permanence God intended sexuality to represent. Here too, gracious self-restraint is needed. Young people, make a commitment with those you court or date, that you will preserve each other's bodies for the beauty and fulfillment of marriage. Don't break God's command by sinning against your own body. Deny yourself and seek the best for the one you love. Remember, true love does not harm or lead another into sin. In this context, to say "no" is to truly love. If any of you are presently engaged in unlawful sexual activity, I warn you to cease immediately, repent of your sin, and turn to God for mercy.

We must also avoid provoking lust with our appearance and dress. Men and women must dress modestly, Fashions exposing or accentuating the shame of our nakedness offend the Lord and arouse fleshly lusts. God reckons the sin of lusting to the account of those who promote it as well as those who engage directly in it.

Worldly parties, unedifying entertainment, night clubs, and dancing excite the lusts of the flesh. Love not this world, John warns.

That includes worldly music. Hard rock, soft rock, Christian contemporary music, and many other forms of music today, explicitly by their lyrics or implicitly by their beat, promote the lusts of the flesh. We need to ask of all the music we listen to: Can I pray over this music? Does this music glorify God or ignite fleshly lusts? If it facilitates lust, destroy it. Rid yourself of every CD, every piece of music that leads you away from God. Don't love this present, evil world.

Second, John warns against the "lust of the eyes." He warns not to love a world that delights in the lusts of the eyes.

How active Satan is today to engage our eyes, particularly through tempting us to indulge in various forms of sinful and worldly entertainment. Just as he approached our first parents to tempt them to believe that their Creator was a hard, legalistic God, so he approaches us, and particularly you, young people, whispering, "Has God said that you cannot eat from all the trees of modern entertainment? Has He said, 'You can't watch immoral movies or engage in any activity that tempts your eyes to lust'? Doesn't He want you to live a boring life, like David who · confessed in Psalm 101, 'I will set no wicked thing before mine

eyes'?--and so, isn't He a hard, legalistic God?"

Then Satan whispers, "If you just watch this one immoral movie, you shall not die. You will be enlightened; you'll be in the know. You'll be able to speak with your peers as they discuss the latest movie. Remember, if you don't participate, you will miss the fun and excitement others have. Besides, everyone is going to these movies anyhow. Go ahead, eat this fruit; you will surely live, you shall not die. Try it once and see for yourself. Do you always want to stay under the thumb of your parents, or the church? Aren't you old enough to decide for yourself what is right and wrong? You can shake off the evil, can't you? Take charge of your own life now-go ahead, let your eyes lust just once. Be your own god; determine good and evil for yourself!"

Satan has been using such approaches for thousands of years. He still goes about as a roaring lion, seeking to devour you through your eye-gate. He knows his time is short, so he will do anything to move people to look with lust in their eyes at bad fruit hanging on the tree of forbidden entertainment-any evil fruit that looks pleasant to the eyes and is desired to make one wise in this world. Perhaps he'll even use a friend to entice you, as he used Eve to tempt Adam. Satan is a master at hiding himself under the cloak of friendship.

How many have fallen prey to Satan's temptations to attend the theatre to indulge in the lusting of the eye. He whispers: "This movie isn't so bad. It has a G or PG rating. You can't always be saying no to everyone. Don't be so righteous overmuch." Then, as you slide down the slippery slope of ungodly entertainment that Satan seeks to lead you a step at a time, your conscience gradually becomes desensitized to sin.

Young people, Satan is always fishing to hook your soul on his bait. He baits his hook with lusts of the eye, but hides his hook. How many of you have become hooked on his entertainment bait-watching films that involve every imaginable sin. Some of you are hooked on watching scenes of violence, or fornication. Disrespect for authority, profanity, lying, theft, and mockery of God's institutions scarcely phase you as you watch iniquity played out before your eyes. Oh, what poisonous, forbidden fruit this is!

Today Satan is making such fruit even more tempting by bringing it into the

home. Especially to our people, he whispers, "You don't have to stand in line at the theatre feeling guilty anymore, hoping no one will see you." Instead, he provides entertainment films, as bad or worse than those at the theatre in video format or on the Internet, so that you can watch them in the privacy and comfort of your own home. Video rental stores have sprung up all over our city and country. Dear congregation, let us not love the world. Let us draw a clear line here. Let us say "no" to all video and Internet use for entertainment purposes that will indulge the lust of the eyes.

Entertainment movies, videos, and Internet pornography represent a powerful multi-million dollar industry intent on glamorizing sin. Fornication is made to appear innocent, commonplace, and exciting. Murder is portrayed as thrilling and manly. Profanity is presented as normal, emphatic speech.

Let us not trust our own strength; we overestimate ourselves if we think we can glean good out of entertainment that embraces sin. None of us have advanced spiritually as far as the apostle Paul. Even he had to complain against himself, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:18-19).

The same principles apply to television. The vast bulk of television shows are productions of an anti-Christian nature. They are positively harmful to our spiritual life and growth. Like David, let us not love the world, but make a covenant with our eyes that we will set no wicked thing before us. Let us dispense also with all wicked magazines, trashy love novels, and profane books-yes, with all printed and visual material that contradicts the Ten Commandments.

How can we pray not to be led into temptation while continuing to play with the fire of temptation? James warns us that "every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:14-15).

Flee the lusts of the eye. Strive for self-denial. Follow Paul who said, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16). "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not

provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom. 13:14).

Finally, John warns against "the pride of life." How prevalent such pride is in our hearts by nature! George Swinnock said, "Pride is the first shirt we put on in Paradise and the last we shall take off when we die." Pride of life can include:

1. *Pride of myself and my own accomplishments.* Pride of life is at the root of our humanistic hearts. We are filled, by nature, with self-gratification, self-contentment, and self-fulfilment. We want to be ruler and controller of our own destiny. We live for ourselves, exalting our own wisdom and accomplishments.

2. *Pride of false religions.* All religions in the world that challenge Scripture, teaching that man must do or accomplish something in his own strength to find favor with God, are false and proud religions. That includes those who adhere to some form of free-will Christianity. To assert that fallen, depraved man can do anything contributory to his salvation, oozes with pride.

3. *Pride in challenging the governing providence of God.* That includes the traditional sects such as Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as Masonry or secret lodges. It embraces all customs and practices related to the New Age Movement and transcendental meditation. All practices related to the occult, such as fortune-telling, consulting horoscopes, ouija boards, and palm-reading are also rooted in the pride of life. All unbiblical attempts to destroy life through artificial birth control, abortion, or euthanasia also attempt to usurp the power of divine providence.

4. *Pride in idolizing movie actors, sports heroes, government leaders, or other popular figures in church or society.* John condemns all human idolization as the pride of life.

5. *Pride in materialism.* The love of money lies at the heart of the pride of life. Loving our possessions-such as our homes or cars or clothing more than God is idolatrous pride of life; it feeds our quest for pleasure and gratification. It provides status symbols. Dishonesty in business, tax evasion, or other illegal ways of increasing personal wealth also serve the pride of life. All covetousness or inordinate desires to become rich and increased with goods at the expense of our

own and our family's spiritual welfare is rooted in pride. Pride of life is served by gambling, lotteries, and all that results in lack of stewardship in which our firstfruits must be given to the Lord.

6. *Pride in desecration of the Lord's Day and neglect of worship services.* How proud must we be to think that we don't need one day in seven to exclusively worship the Lord and that we don't need weekly spiritual food in His house to nurture us for the coming week!

Dear friends, I trust that enough has been said to show that nearly any predominant sin can be classified under one or more of these three broad paths and vivid descriptions of worldliness: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Which path are you most prone to walk down? Do you engage in holy warfare against all three of these paths? Do you walk a separate lifestyle from the world? Are you a pilgrim and stranger on the earth? My people "shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations," God says in Numbers 23:9. Can that be said of you? Do you love the Father or do you love the world?

Eternal consequences hinge upon your answers to these questions. John goes on to say, such worldliness is accursed of God, for "the world passeth away, and the lust thereof" (v. 17). That's the second reason John provides us for not loving the world.

### **III. The curse of worldliness**

The world's best pleasures are but temporary. The world is our passage, not our portion. You and I have a unilateral appointment with death, made by God Himself. Our death-date is on His calendar. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment," Hebrews 9:27 says. You and I have no escape from death. Death knows no bail, no parole.

The world will one day be burnt up, together with all its lusts and devotees. Fill your life with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, the pride of life, and what have you acquired? A worldly life that will end in eternal hell.

All these lusts for which people have sold their bodies and souls, ruined their families, and stained their own reputations-what do they have when these lusts are passed away? Nothing but a gnawing worm-a worm that can never die, and the

wrath of God as an unquenchable fire. That is all that the love of the world can do for you, despite all your hard work, your daily anxiety, and your pursuit of pleasure. Spurgeon said, "If you had got all the world, you would have got nothing after your coffin was screwed down but grave dust in your mouth."

Such is the end of the world. You too, my friend, you shall die and meet God. And what then? Are you prepared? Do you love the Father or do you love the world? The world passes away, together with all its lusts. Death is the final extinguisher of all human hopes and pleasures.

Oh, that I could persuade everyone of you that the world is temporary, vain, unworthy of your time and attention! The world never gives what it promises. It is a gigantic mirage, a tragic fraud, a hollow bubble. The world lacks substance.

John Trapp wrote, "Pleasure, profit, and preferment are the worldling's trinity." Long ago, Solomon discovered all three to be vanity. Read Ecclesiastes carefully, friends. Then you will understand why John Bunyan called the world Vanity Fair. No wonder James states: "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (4:4).

Thank God there is a cure for worldliness. Let's consider that in our last thought after we sing.

## APPLICATION

### **IV. The deliverance from worldliness**

God's deliverance of His people from worldliness can be broken down into three thoughts: initial deliverance, continual deliverance, and perfected deliverance. Let's look at each of these briefly.

#### *Initial Deliverance*

In every true work of grace in the heart of a sinner, there is without exception a fundamental and radical deliverance from attachment to the world and a pattern of worldliness. In other words, the umbilical cord that tied us to the womb of our native worldliness is cut when we are born into the kingdom of God. If our life support system is still one that flows from the womb of the world, no matter how much you know about Christ or are found among His people, you are still a

worldling. If your heart is still in the world, you are like Lot's wife, notwithstanding the fact that you appear to have left Sodom. You are yet in a state of wrath and condemnation.

Why is this so? For two important reasons. First, because Christ died with the express intention of cutting the umbilical cord between the saved sinner and the world. Galatians 1:4 says that Christ "gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." What the Father purposes, the Son purchases. Christ didn't just come as a substitute for His people to deliver them from eternal condemnation, great as that is, but it was the Father's will that He would also come to deliver them from this present evil world. All the beatings and spittings that He bore, the shame of His nakedness, the shrouded heavens and His cry of dereliction, serve to His seeing the travail of His soul and being satisfied because He gave Himself for the sins of those whom He determined, in the application of that salvation, would be wrenched out of this present evil world and be brought into the kingdom of God and into the possession of the forgiveness of their sins.

Second, because the Holy Spirit makes the Father and Son's intention efficacious in the application of the saving virtue of the death of Christ. Paul says in Galatians 6:14, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Paul is saying that the cross of Jesus Christ was so powerful to me, by the applying work of the Spirit, that it made the world as undesirable to me as a crucified Roman felon. The world not only lost its fair colors, but became positively homely to Paul.

But Paul also adds that he died to the world. Before Paul came to a Spirit-wrought understanding of who Jesus of Nazareth was and the significance of the cross, he was the favored son of an entire segment of Judaism. He was the rising star of Pharasaic Judaism. He was Gamaliel's prize pupil. Paul said that he outstripped all his peers in zeal for that arrogant world of Judaism. In that context, Paul was a worldling. Not that he abandoned himself to the standards of the dishonest and cheating men of this world-for, as touching the externals of the law, he was blameless. But he lived for the pride of life in his growing stature among the Pharisees.

When Paul's eyes were opened on his Damascus journey to see that he was persecuting the Lord of glory, he immediately cried out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). Paul felt: If Jesus is God, and He has arrested me in His grace, then I have been a fool all my life. Soon the stupendous beauty of Christ's cross conquered Paul fully, so that he now only had an eye and a heart for Christ and His glory. Paul was then not only crucified to his world of Judaism, but the Judaizers now thought of him in a parallel manner as he thought of them. Paul was saying: "When I saw my own wretched, hell-deserving heart as a seething caldron of all kinds of sin and wickedness, and I cast all my guilt and bondage upon the crucified Savior and I found forgiveness and life in Him, and I declared boldly in the synagogue that Jesus is truly the Son of God, suddenly I was no more attractive to the Judaistic world than that Judaistic world now was to me. The world was crucified to me and I to the world. I began to live by a new set of standards. I began to live my life under the pressure of goals and longings that made me despicable in the eyes of the respected Jew."

Paul experienced a cleavage that went in both directions. That cleavage is still experienced today when God converts a sinner. That's why Jesus said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:18-19).

What about you, my friend? Has the beauty of Christ ever de-beautified the world to you and you to the world? Has the crucified Christ caused the world to be crucified to you? Has the love of the Father in Christ conquered within you the love of the world so that the world no longer has dominion over you?

Or do you still willingly cling to this world? Is the world to you still something handsome and attractive? Does the stroke of the world's hand still move you? Do the world's institutions and goals, its opinions and principles, its entertainment and speech still hold sway in your heart? Do you love the world more than the church? Then you love Satan more than God, and you are still under the power of the prince of this world. The cross of Christ has never been efficaciously applied to your heart by the Holy Spirit. No sinner ever received forgiveness of sin rooted in the virtue of the cross of Christ who did not have the world crucified to him.

Scripture says plainly they that are Christ's "have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24).

No true child of God lives dominated by the threefold cord-Satan, flesh, and the world-by which sinners are bound to the world. John says, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him"-i.e. if there is a basic, predominant, undisturbed attachment of love to the world, God's love is not in us and we do not love God. John does not say that the love of the Father is hidden or temporarily squelched, but that that love does not exist. The term carnal Christian is a heretical oxymoron; no true Christian is fundamentally carnal.

You and I are either Christians or worldlings. If we're Christians, we are of course imperfect Christians. We're not talking now about the struggles with remaining affinities or certain aspects of the world and its pleasures that may retain some allurements to the believer. That struggle will continue until our last breath. Nevertheless, a Christian is not a worldling. The world has been crucified to us and we to the world. Our goal in life is no longer to live under the dominion of the lust of the flesh (merely enjoying things), the lust of the eye (merely having things), and the pride of life (merely being someone).

On the other hand, if that which sets our standards, makes us tick, draws out our energy, and excites our emotions, habitually has to do with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, the love of the Father is not in us. You have never known the effectual application of the death of Christ to your soul. You are still entrapped in the womb of this present, evil world. You are still marching to the beat of this world's drum. Your citizenship is still on this earth.

But if we are true Christians, we have a transplanted citizenship in heaven. Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence we await the coming of our Lord. The rules that govern us originate from where our citizenship is, and we will live by the rule and law of heaven. We do not live for this present age but for the age to come. We are pilgrims and sojourners. We have here no abiding place but we look for a city to come. Above all, we look for the King who sits enthroned in majesty and splendor and glory, for the Lamb is all the glory of Emmanuel's land.

*Continued Deliverance*

God's gracious deliverance works itself out continually in the believer's life. In the initial implantation of grace, the dominion of sin and the world are broken. They no longer reign though they remain. They are no longer president of the soul though they are yet resident in the soul. Sin still finds expression in the remnants of worldliness that cling to the born-again believer. The desire to have the approval of those who are living worldly--who are living by the standards and goals of the world-is not altogether dead. Believers are still tempted to conform to the world's standards-be it out of peer pressure, or for economic advancement. We are tempted to have our yea be not quite fully yea in a business deal, or our yea may not quite be fully yea in our personal relationships when we may incur the frown of a worldling. How is this deliverance to be continually wrought in us when we are still so prone to compromise both our yea and our nay?

Only by *doing* the will of God, John tells us (v. 17c). But what does that involve?

*We must believe that it is crucial to fight against worldliness.* If you're not convinced that you must fight against it with all your being, you will seldom make any headway. James 1:27 says, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." The purity of our religion is in direct proportion to our commitment that we shall not allow one stain of the world to be placed upon the garments of the imparted righteousness that God has graciously granted me in His regenerating work.

James uses such vivid, antithetical language. James 4:4 says, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." He says that such people are guilty of spiritual adultery. James uses strong language because Christ died as the heavenly Bridegroom to have a chaste and spotless bride whose heart is wholly His. When you flirt with the world, you're guilty of spiritual adultery.

Teenagers, do some of you say: "I know that some of the standards in dress and modern fashion reflect a lifestyle that is not biblical, but I can't bear being out of step with the latest styles around me. I must be the world's friend." But at what

price, my friend? At the price of being an enemy of God?

Or perhaps you say, "I know that the lyrics of the music I listen to are sinful and hellish, but I don't concentrate on the lyrics. Besides, if I don't know the latest hits and the latest groups, I'll look like a fool. I know too that the music is filled with repetitive noise that is born of hell where there is no order and beauty and symmetry, but my friends would mock me if I didn't listen to just enough to be able to be with it." At the expense of being an enemy of God?

Do you want pure religion with a pure conscience? Then you must, in dependence upon God, do the will of God by fighting to remain unspotted from the world. If I would have my heart be kept as a chaste virgin to Christ, as Paul puts, I must not let the world's smiles or frowns cause me to alter my standards, change my goals, or shape what I am convinced from the Word of God are the standards for personal dress and the usage of modern entertainment. Are you jealous to retain a virgin's heart for your blessed Savior? Let us dare, friends, to be Daniels in Babylon.

*We must use every God-ordained means to conquer worldliness.* Use especially the Word of God. Listen repeatedly to sermons. Saturate yourself with Scripture. Meditate on the Word of God. Read good books that can make you wise to salvation. Pray without ceasing. Fellowship with believers. Sanctify the Lord's Day. Consider keeping a spiritual journal. Evangelize and serve others. Be a good steward of your time and your money.

Dear young people, the world is seeking to squeeze you into its mold, its standards, its perspectives, its values. All the media shout at you, as do some of your peers, to live for this present, evil world. You cannot counter that onslaught without immersing yourself in the Word of God. How can you be the blessed man of Psalm 1 who meditates on the Word of God day and night if you seldom spend time with the Scriptures? Ask for grace to search, know, pray over, love, and live the Word of God.

*We must continually trust our great High Priest and His Spirit.* At times when the power of the world seems to invade my soul again, what comfort there is in remembering that our great High Priest prayed, "Father, I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world [here world is used in the sense of this earth),

but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:15). Blessed be God that at times when every visible defense seems to be down and we are vulnerable to yielding to the foul power of the enemy of our souls, our deliverance is traceable only to the intercession of Jesus Christ and the preserving power of His Spirit. Then we cry out afterwards, “Dear Savior, were it not for Thy intercession, and blessed Spirit, for Thy preservation, in the hour of temptation, I would have been swept into evil.”

Spurgeon put it this way: “I thank God that when temptation is present, He removes my desire, and when desire to sin is present, He removes the temptation.” That, friends, is always the gracious fruit of Jesus Christ who promises His Peters that He will pray for them in the hour of temptation that their faith will not fail (Luke 22:32).

### *Perfected Deliverance*

Finally, dear believers, our gracious deliverance will be perfected and consummated in the age to come, which, says John, “abideth forever!” This age is the age where worldliness is part of the burden of the overlapping of the ages. Heaven is in our hearts and in our deepest affections, dear believer, and yet the world and the devil are still at our elbow and too often penetrate our mind. But thank God that in the age to come, nothing but righteousness will dwell in the new heavens and the new earth. This *kosmos*, this *aion*, under the curse of God and the prince of the power of the air, will be no more. Satan and all his will be banished to eternal perdition. And the people of God will shine in the firmament of God's redemptive glory.

In conclusion, we all face the danger of being a present-day Demas in the midst of the world. “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world,” Paul lamented (2 Tim. 4:10). Demas prayed and labored with Paul. He witnessed Paul's yearnings after his fellow country men. He saw the tears of Paul staining the parchments when the apostle wrote his pastoral letters. At one point, Paul even called him: “Demas, my fellow-worker.”

Demas forsook the godly apostle who was crucified to the world. What caused Demas to abandon Paul and everything that he stood for? The world bewitched him! Dear friends, beware of anything that has its tap roots in this world's standard

of success. We must die to our success standards.

Who among us will forsake the truth, having loved this present evil world? Beware of the danger of this world.

Only one thing matters: Jesus drawing near with His Word and the kisses of His own presence. Then, and may God fulfil it in us, the world will lie at our feet as dead and we dead to the world. AMEN.

# Enduring Persecution in the Christian Life

*Rev. M. Kelderman*

- Psalter 336:1,2 2
- Corinthians 4
- Psalter 122:3,4,5
- Psalter 152:1,2,3,5
- Psalter 331:1,4

Dear congregation, today many Christians are being persecuted for the sake of the gospel. I especially think of Christians in those countries where even meeting together, as we do, is at the risk of their lives, and of being tortured. In other places, ministers of the gospel are imprisoned and silenced from the pulpit. And even in North America, we are now seeing a growing separation between those who will live godly and those who will not. History shows that when the church is especially faithful to the Word of God, she gives a sharper witness to the world of that impending destruction that is coming when this world shall be devoured with flames and evildoers shall be burned up. The more the church points out the gracious character of God and the deceitfulness of men, the more she is persecuted. This will increase as we see the last day approaching when the Son of Man shall come upon the clouds of heaven.

On this National Day of Prayer for the persecuted church, we could focus on those who are persecuted worldwide, including how we are to pray for them and what sort of situations they are finding themselves in. Yet, when we read or hear of them, they would not have us focus on them, but they would have us focus on Christ. Many times, I am afraid, the persecuted church is praying more for us than we are praying for them. They are praying for the people in the West who have been defiled through the riches of this world, who are not giving a consistent witness to the name of Jesus Christ. Is this you and me who they are praying for, and shall we not even remember those who are in bonds as being bound with them? Therefore, in light of this persecution worldwide, let us turn to 2 Timothy 3:11b-12, "What persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

We hope to see:

## **Enduring Persecution in the Christian Life**

1. Godly living
2. Guaranteed persecution
3. Glorious deliverance

The apostle Paul knew what it was to be persecuted and what it was to be abased, but he also knew what it was to have been a persecutor. By the grace of God, he became one who was persecuted. In 2 Corinthians 11, we read, "Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities."

What do you glory in, your name, or your infirmity for the sake of Christ? Even while Paul is writing this letter to his spiritual son Timothy, he is in prison for the name and sake of Christ. He writes, "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner" (1:8). And Paul warns Timothy that there will come into the church false teachers having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof; they shall be ever learning, ever coming to knowledge, but never to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. He tells Timothy, they shall be evil men, impostors who shall grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. Paul says to his son Timothy, "Timothy, look at me, look at my life, you have known and seen my doctrine, what manner of life I have lived, my purpose, my faith, my long-suffering, my charity, my patience." Then he says, "Timothy, you have seen the persecutions and afflictions I have endured." And he

adds, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

What is it to live godly in Christ Jesus? Why does Paul put this in connection with, "shall suffer persecution"? The Holy Spirit here, through the apostle Paul, does not want to give us the idea that simply to live godly, that is morally, in this world is sufficient. Many people are moving toward some morality in their life. You hear that when you speak with people on the plane. They tell me that they themselves have been worldly, dabbling with drugs, and practicing immorality, but now they have children at home and they want to try to teach their children the right way because they see that there is something attractive about morality after all, but they forget that Paul says, "godly in Christ Jesus." They separate living godly from Him who gave the commandments, the moral law. It is only when we are in Christ Jesus that we can live godly. To live godly and to be in Christ Jesus is, for Paul, one concept, one truth. To live godly presupposes that we are declared righteous by Christ, that we are born again, that we have been made one with Him by a lively, saving faith that trusts only in the righteousness of Christ Jesus.

In the world today, we are confronted with a large number of choices. There are many churches you could have gone to today. There are many different religions you could choose to belong to, and you will find the common opinion among many in this world is: "You can believe what you want to believe but I will believe what I want to believe. You must respect my opinion and I will respect your opinion, as long as you are not exclusive in your opinion. Don't tell me that mine is wrong and yours is right. We are all entitled to our own opinions. If I define adultery in different terms than what you do, that's my opinion and my choice." But here Paul is saying that living godly in Christ Jesus is the only way. He is referring back to what he said in verse 10, where he says, thou hast known my doctrine, my manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, and patience. All who hear the gospel, but especially those who are saved by Christ, are called to live godly in Christ Jesus. It is thus not a private affair, where I simply have my own religion to myself, but we are to live godly in the midst of this world. We must give testimony to the One who has bought us. Christianity must be confessed; it must be lived.

What is your confession in the midst of this world? Can you say that you have lived your life so that others, looking at you day by day, would say to their friends,

“There is one that walks like Christ walked”? Do you walk in the midst of your family so that you are known, by word and deed, for calling sin sin, grace grace, and God God? Do you do this with humility and a recognition that when you see the sinful lifestyles of others, you say, "There but for the grace of God, go I?" Do you speak out against what is sinful and for grace? Do you bring God's Word to bear upon your families and your friends. No, we don't go about looking for trouble in the midst of this world, as if we are looking for persecution, but the fact is, if we don't have any persecution without and within, then there is a serious question of whether we are living godly in Christ Jesus.

Whom do you fear more, God or man? Who is predominant in your life? Who influences your decisions day by day? Who influences your actions? Little children, when you are in school and one of your friends or classmates asks you to do something that you know you shouldn't do, what is your first thought? Is it, “I wonder what they will think of me if I don't do this,” or do you think about what God thinks of this and therefore you can't do it? Who is bigger? Whom do you serve? God or man? It can be, of course, that God's people fall into the fear of men. Think of Elijah, standing on Mount Carmel, saying, “Choose you whom you will serve. If God be God, serve him. If Baal be God, serve him,” while a few hours later, he runs from Jezebel.

When we speak of persecution, of those who are suffering in other lands for the name of Christ, we can sympathize with them. We may even consider dying for Christ if we were required to. But sometimes it is easier to say that we will die for Him than to live for Him. If I told you that you need not suffer death to serve Christ and to live godly, but you must spend your years in being unpopular, or poor, or mocked, is that something you would choose to do? There are many today who have discarded their faith in the face of persecution and have joined themselves with the world. Whom do you fear more, men or God? You know, it is relatively easy to travel to Mexico or a large city like Toronto or New York, and evangelize the people on the street, but if we haven't evangelized those in our own home, who are we fearing? Who do we live unto?

Are you living godly in Christ Jesus? None of us have consistently had the boldness and clarity with which Jesus testified to the gospel. None of us are able to

extract the fear of man from our hearts as we ought, and to open our mouths to speak to others as we ought, We must seek to be conformed to the image of Christ so that we would more and more live godly in Christ Jesus. We must do this even if it makes us unpopular and appear as fools in the sight of the world. Are you going to rise up in the midst of this generation on the last day and say I have witnessed to you, or shall the world testify against you, rising up in judgment against you?

Perhaps the days are coming when we will be worshiping in homes and in barns. Are you ready? Have you counted the cost? Are you ready to be counted among those who do not bow the knee to this world? Are you living godly in Christ Jesus? This does not consist simply of living a moral life and coming to church. All of these things are necessary indeed, but are you seeking to be more holy in Christ? Do you seek your holiness in Him and then seek to live a life of gratitude to Him for His glorious salvation? Is it the practice of your life to avoid every sin as it comes into your mind? Do you crucify sin at every cost, seeking the grace of God to put it to death within you?

You all have the calling to live Christianly. At your work, in your everyday living, is where you are called to exercise this calling. Are you seeking to be conformed more and more to Christ in every area of your life? Are you more and more dependent upon the intercession and mediatorial work of Christ alone? Do you need Him more and more every day and go to Him for forgiveness and cleansing and strength for each day and each hour?

Are you in Christ Jesus? That prompts a life of obedience. We read that Jesus Himself learned obedience by the things He suffered. God brings His people through trials and afflictions so that they too might learn obedience. By afflictions and trials and persecutions the child of God often grows the most. That's not an enjoyable way for the flesh, but it is a profitable way. It is impossible that we should be equal to Jesus in His sufferings and pains, but we are called to resemble Him.

Who is able to live godly in Christ Jesus as we are called to do? This life of obedience and this godly living seems more fit for angels and just men made perfect than for us who remain in the flesh and combat indwelling sin. To live

godly in Christ Jesus is only possible if we are dependent on the mediatorial work of Christ who is at the right hand of the Father making intercession for His church. His work is full and complete. He sits at the right hand of God. God sees the work of His Son and rests in it. The angels see the work of Christ and are amazed and wonder. We are also to rest satisfied in what He has done, and at the end of each day we must confess we fall short. We are unprofitable servants. What a wonder it is then, when we come to the throne of grace and mercy, that we find we are not cast away for all our defects. When we look to that One who sits at the right hand of His Father, we have bold access to the throne of God in confidence that we will be heard by the faith of Him who was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification, who ever lives to make intercession for us.

Do you live godly in Christ Jesus? If so, then you will suffer persecution. That is our second thought, the guarantee of persecution. Paul says, "All those that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." This is a constant theme of Scripture that we, in this 21st century of wealth and luxury, seem to forget. You can find this theme repeatedly in the epistles of Peter and Paul. Peter says in 1 Peter 4, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." And Jesus said, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." He calls to you and me, "Take up your cross and follow Me."

Watson said, "Persecution is the legacy bequeathed from Christ to His people." Jesus said in John 15, "Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not

greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

Paul doesn't tell us how much persecution we will endure, whether we shall suffer unto death, or suffer inward trial and temptation. Indeed, the Lord can give His people a quiet and a calm life. Proverbs 16 says that when a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. And yet our text, as well as many scriptures, set forth the antithesis between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. So Paul is here not only referring to his own life, but to the lives of all believers. All who live godly must expect suffering.

What sufferings did Paul want to point out to Timothy? In Acts 13 and 14, we see what Paul endured and what he was most likely referring to when he says that persecutions and afflictions came to him at Antioch, Iconium, and at Lystra. At the beginning of Acts 13 he had preached for two Sabbaths at Antioch. The Jews had become angry with his preaching that Christ was the Messiah, but the Gentiles were glad. Then in chapter 13:49-52 we read, "The word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost." So Paul and Barnabas speak the Word at Iconium, and again, you read in chapter 14, unbelieving Jews stirred up insurrection against them. You can see throughout the book of Acts that there is a clear refusal of the Jews to bow before Christ. Those who are religious often persecute the church the most. When they were about to be assaulted in chapter 14, they fled to Lystra and Derbe, where they preached the gospel and performed the miracle of healing the lame man, and then certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium persuaded the people to stone Paul. They dragged him out of the city and left him for dead and then verses 20-22 say, "Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Paul in essence is telling Timothy,

“Don't forget that it is through much tribulation that we enter the kingdom of God.

Isn't it being engaged in warfare that makes a soldier a good soldier? Suffering is necessary for triumph; without this, how can you really show that you are living godly in Christ Jesus? Without this, are you showing that you fear God or fear man? I would not have those who can not yet name the name of Christ, to hold back from coming to Him because of the persecution that may ensue and come upon you, by naming His name. I can tell you that no matter what persecutions come, if you may by grace live godly in Christ Jesus, there is no greater joy and no greater satisfaction than to serve Him no matter what persecutions, trials, or afflictions come upon you. The pleasure of sin can never give what God offers in salvation in His Son. We must always realize that when we are born again, when we come to live, by the grace of God, godly in Christ Jesus, we are declaring war against sin and the world and they in turn declare war on us. Human nature is basically the same from the beginning of the world until this very day. Cain's anger toward his brother Abel still exists today. How often doesn't it happen that two unbelievers are married and when one of them comes to faith in Christ, then the other persecutes the new convert. Perhaps a young person is converted and there are others who mock and ridicule him. Perhaps at one time he was praised for being the life of the party, now he is despised. God's people are called to endure slander and ridicule not only from the world, but sad to say, must often endure it even within the church. Brothers and sisters calling upon the same God revile one another. Let it not be once so named among you. Christ says that men shall say all manner of evil against you, but He says they shall do it falsely. So if any one speaks evil of you or me, it ought to be because they do it falsely. There ought to be no ground for anyone to say anything against us. We ought to give no reason for them to speak ill concerning us. We must give a good testimony of the Christianity we are called to live.

When we follow Jesus Himself from the manger, because there was no place for Him in the inn, all the way to the cross, was there any persecution like His? He was reviled, He was slandered, He was mocked, He was rebuked, He was bruised, He was smitten, He was crucified, He was spoken evil against falsely. What a contrast! The Son of man, a man of sorrows and acquainted with griefs, was forsaken even

by His disciples in His greatest hour of need. Do you shrink from suffering for Him? Despite Jesus' suffering, where was His eye? His eye was focused on the will of His Father. That's where the anchor of our hope, and where our eye must be focused as well; so it does not fall on the circumstances and the persecutions which befall us, but falls upon the will of our heavenly Father. That's why Paul writes to Timothy, "But out of them all the Lord delivered me." This glorious deliverance is our third thought. First let us sing from Psalter 152: 1, 2, 3, 5.

## **APPLICATION**

Paul writes to Timothy, "But out of them all the Lord delivered me." Paul is implying by these words that in each persecution he encountered, the Lord was faithful to His word. He has given words to speak. He has given the strength in the hour of need. Paul is saying that whatever affliction Timothy or God's people are called to endure, the Lord delivers out of them all. That's the comfort that Paul wants Timothy to rejoice in as well. "Timothy," he says, "you are surrounded by false teachers. I see them on every side, and they are denying the Lord who bought them. Evil men and seducers are waxing worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. Despite all of this, the Lord delivers out of all things."

The Lord does not send a persecution, a trial in our life, but He gives grace to undergo it. Didn't He also say to Paul, "My strength is sufficient for thee"? And so, dear believer, this truth is the same also for you. Your Father has set boundaries for Satan which he cannot pass in your life. The very hairs of your head are numbered. Are not the thoughts that come into your mind, the persecutions and afflictions that come from without, also in the hand of Him with whom we have to do? If you are mocked and ridiculed for your convictions and beliefs, if you are threatened that you will have no friends, does not Christ promise to be a friend that sticks closer than a brother?

If you are tempted by your own wicked heart, take courage, for one day that old man nature shall finally be put to death in the grave. You shall be clothed with the glory of Christ. You shall appear like Him when He appears. Are you forsaken by family and friends? Fear not, the Lord will reveal Himself unto you and be that Friend who sticks closer than a brother. Are you afraid that someday you will be cast into prison or do you fear that your body will be racked with the shackles of

iron and then you will deny Him? Even then, Christ will send His angels to minister His own presence in your heart by His Word and Spirit to comfort you. This is a comfort, my friends, which the world can never give you. There is no comfort like that in this world.

But this comfort is only for those who are in Christ Jesus. We read of a martyr who cried at the stake, "Come you papists, if you want a miracle, here behold one as we are in this bed of flames. This is a bed of flames, but to us, it is a bed of down." Fear not them who can harm your body. Fear not men; once they have destroyed the body they can do no more, but fear God; He alone is able to destroy body and soul in hell. Though you be threatened to be burned alive, think of Daniel and his three friends; Christ will be in the midst of the flame with you or those flames themselves will be the chariot that ushers you to glory into the presence of the One you love. O dare, dare to live godly in Christ Jesus though you suffer all manner of persecution. Isn't that what we read from 2 Corinthians 4? "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed.... Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body....For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

We cannot live godly in Christ Jesus, unless we are under the sway and dominion of Jesus Christ Himself. Are you energized by the grace and Spirit of Christ? From whom is your fruit found? Can you say: "We live, yet not we, but Christ lives in us and the life we live in the flesh, we live by the faith of the Son of God"? That is the glorious deliverance that is promised to the church of God, to all who live godly in Christ Jesus. Jesus Himself says in Luke 21, "Lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh," and furthermore he says, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." And when by faith we may see that we are made one with Him, then the One who has overcome the world gives us the power and the strength we need to live godly in Christ Jesus, to endure the persecution, suffering, and trial that comes upon us. This was Paul's hope, this was Paul's confidence, this was his consolation. Child of God, this ought to be yours as well. How does Paul conclude his letter to Timothy? In prison, enduring

persecution, he writes to Timothy, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them." He writes in chapter 4, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." Then he concludes saying, "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever."

There are several questions we set before you today. Since all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution, the first question is: Are you living godly? Are you living out of Christ or are you still living for your own account? Is Satan your father, the one whom you serve, or can you say, "Our Father which art in heaven?" Are you in Christ Jesus? The second question is: Are you being persecuted or are you a persecutor? Are you being persecuted without cause or are there causes other than Christ Himself that explain why people persecute you?

We read in Revelation 12, "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." Do you know the accuser of the brethren, who often persecutes within, sometimes even more than the world persecutes without? When he comes and points to a particular sin, to a going astray, when he says, now there is no hope for you-do you realize that we are

called to overcome him in the blood of the Lamb? Then on that day, when we have overcome him in Christ Jesus, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself shall wipe away every tear from our eyes, every sorrow from our heart. He will hold us in His tender, loving embrace, and we shall be forever with the Lord. AMEN.

# Advent and the First Gospel Promise

*Dr. Joel R. Beeke*

- Psalter 217
- Read Genesis 3
- Psalter 275
- Psalter 92:1,5
- Psalter 200

Dear congregation, during these weeks we enter a new ecclesiastical year. For four weeks prior to Christmas, the message of Advent sets the tone for the Christian church's festival season which lasts for six months, finding its culmination in Pentecost.

"Advent" is a Latin word which means *coming, arriving, approaching*, and often contains the notion of haste. The church calls its four-week pre-Christmas season *Advent* because of the comings of Jesus Christ. In the fullness of time, He came with haste in Bethlehem's manger (the First Advent). He shall come again upon the clouds with haste to judge the living and the dead when God's time is ripe (the Second Advent).

Advent also contains the idea of waiting-waiting for the coming Messiah. Oh, that we all this Advent season may experience something of that true waiting for the Christ-child! True waiting for Jesus is not a task human nature enjoys. True waiting is hard work. It involves wrestling and looking and expecting. True waiting is very different from passive indifference. To wait by faith requires both confident expectation and holy impatience. The chord of balance between these twin gifts can only be properly struck through the guidance of the blessed Holy Spirit: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zec, 4:6). Such waiting in dependency upon the Spirit will result in a genuine spiritual breakthrough at Bethlehem's manger. The sinner who learns to cry the authentic advent complaint, "Give me Jesus, else I die," shall not be disappointed in the Christmas time of divine fulfilment. Our prayer for each of you is that this blessing be experienced for the first time or by renewal this very Christmas season.

For God's church, Advent contains profound meaning. Advent memorializes the

past. Advent confesses faith for the future. Advent gives expression to present yearnings and hope. Advent preaches that the coming Christ of yesterday and of tomorrow is the always coming, always advent Christ of today. Advent preaches that Christ is always on His way, always near-at-hand, yes, always present. Advent proclaims, "For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.... Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:5b, 8).

Today we want to turn to the first advent text of Scripture. We ask your attention for our text which you can find in Genesis 3, verse 15: "*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*"

With God's help, we wish to address the theme, *Advent and the First Gospel Promise*, in three thoughts:

1. Enmity announced by God
2. Conflict waged by Satan
3. Victory assured in Christ

I repeat: Advent and the First Gospel Promise. First, we will consider the enmity announced by God, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman." Second, we will examine the conflict waged by Satan, "it [that is, Satan] shall bruise thy head." Third, we want to conclude by seeing victory assured in Christ, "and thou [that is, Christ] shalt bruise his heel."

## **I. Enmity Announced by God**

Genesis 3 has rightly been called "the black chapter" of Scripture. Our fall in Adam is the blackest reality of human history. Genesis 3 tells us sad truth about ourselves.

Any attempt to exclude ourselves from Genesis 3 is futile. Through the fall of Adam as representative head in the covenant of works, we have all become children of the devil and servants of sin. We have subjected ourselves to the sentence of death, the infinite wrath of God, the curse of the law, and the dominion of Satan. Experientially, we must become Adam before God. The fall must become our fall, our guilt.

Genesis 3 unlocks the secrets of numerous tragic truths. How did we break God's

covenant, scorn His majesty, trample His law underfoot, challenge His attributes? How did we turn our backs on our worthy Creator? How did we cast away His image in its narrower sense-exchanging ignorance for knowledge, unrighteousness for righteousness, and perversity for holiness? Genesis 3 informs us succinctly, graphically, and tragically.

Genesis 3 unveils how we have become what we are by nature: lost, condemnable, rejectable sinners; dead in sins and trespasses; hell-worthy, fit to be vessels of sovereign and just reprobation. Total depravity, separation from God, slavery to Satan, the origin of sin and evil, the cause of all misery and death, a stained creation Genesis 3 explains it all.

A black chapter indeed! Its blackness is beyond human expression. Who can comprehend the depth of our fall and its consequences for our natural hearts and daily lives? "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer, 17:9).

By nature, we do not know ourselves. Daily we live out our fall unaware in actions, thoughts, words, motives, and perceptions. We are blind to our blindness. We are such slaves of Satan that this enslaver's hold over us passes us by largely unnoticed. As Rev. Ledebouer wrote, "Our greatest misery is that we do not know our misery."

Grace, however, changes all this. For God's people, sin becomes sin. Satan becomes the archenemy. The fall becomes their fault. The burden of original sin becomes ten times greater experientially than the burden of actual sins. Paul expresses this burden well when he exclaims: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.... O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:18, 19, 24).

Happily, Genesis 3 also speaks about this grace of self-awareness, of self-abasement, as well as the grace of divine intervention and provision. Genesis 3 may also rightly be called "the red chapter" of Scripture, for three reasons: First, on its page the Father's first gospel promise of His coming, blood-shedding Son is unfurled in verse 15 which is our text today. Secondly, on its page the first exercise

of faith in the Father's advent promise of life is expressed by Adam in the naming of his wife Eve, which means in Hebrew *life* or *living*! We read in verse 20, "And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living." Thirdly, on its page, the first sacrificial blood is spilled, pointing to the gospel, when God slew animals to make Adam and Eve coats of skins. We read in verse 21, "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them."

Against the black backdrop of Genesis 3's tragedy, God paints a red chapter of atonement, a white chapter of hope. Genesis 3 preaches that God is always ahead of Satan. It preaches amazing, staggering grace to lost sinners. Especially in the first gospel promise of Genesis 3:15, it presents sovereign grace as flowing out of enmity announced by God, conflict waged against Satan, and victory assured in Christ.

Genesis 3:15 is the first advent text of Scripture. Most remarkable is its beginning—"And I will put enmity." In the original Hebrew, which often accents the first word of a sentence, we read: "Enmity will I put..." "Enmity" introduces Scripture's first gospel promise and sets the tone for the entire verse!

For lost, fallen sinners, *deliverance and enmity* are inseparable. Some find this astonishing. Some do not believe it. They say the gospel should contain nothing but love. Still others do not understand. They ask: *Why does God begin with enmity? Wasn't enmity already present? Didn't Satan show enmity when he tempted Eve? Didn't Eve show enmity when she gave fruit to Adam? Didn't Adam show enmity when he ate forbidden fruit and then blamed God and Eve for his sin? Why would God bring more enmity into a world which only moments prior knew nothing of enmity?*

Enmity itself was not the problem in Paradise. Adam and Eve should have been at holy enmity with, and full of holy hatred towards, the serpent for even suggesting the possibility of eating of the forbidden tree. They knew well that such eating entailed challenging God's authority, calling Him a liar, breaking His covenant and fellowship.

Adam and Eve had a *misdirected* enmity. They directed their enmity against God instead of Satan. Mercifully, the Lord came to intervene in the Paradise scene to

*redirect* their enmity to its proper focus, namely, to sin and Satan. The Lord said, as it were, "Enmity will I place between the serpent and his seed (that is, Satan and unbelievers) and the woman and her seed (that is, representing the elect church). I will reverse your newly acquired values. I will cause you to hate what you now love, and love what you now despise. I will plant new enmity; an enmity which hates sin. I will give you a new heart."

God's surprising intervention in Paradise was not a request to the "free will" of man; it was a declaration, an announcement of His irresistible "free grace," "Enmity I *will* put." God did not stir up enmity already present. He did not request Adam and Eve to put enmity into exercise. In fact, he was not even addressing Himself directly to them, for he was speaking to the serpent.

All of this underscores one solemn truth: Fallen man is not able to put enmity against sin in his own heart. Only God can do what man cannot do for himself. God takes the initiative. This is our only hope as fallen creatures: divine initiative, sovereign intervention, amazing grace.

God takes salvation into His own hands, allowing for no uncertainty: "I *will* put enmity." Hence, the new birth always does *and must* bring new enmity, yes, God-planted enmity. This enmity is against sin, the "old-man" nature, Satan, the pride of life, the lusts of the flesh and eye — anything that dishonors the Lord.

Are you experientially acquainted with this sovereign grace: "Enmity will I put"? Dear believer, you know that you not only *could* not, but also *would* not have placed enmity in your own heart against sin. Is not sovereign grace your only hope—that grace which does all for a sinner who can do nothing rightly? That grace which turns around those who are rushing to hell, and plants their footsteps in the narrow pathway to heaven? Let us now look at our second thought.

## **II. Conflict Waged By Satan.**

The fruit of divine planting will always be conflict. Spiritual life is a struggling, bruising battle. It is holy warfare. Scripture's first gospel promise is plain: "It (that is, the Seed of the woman, the Advent Messiah) shall bruise thy [that is, the serpent's-Satan's] head, and thou [Satan] shalt bruise his (Jesus Christ's) heel."

The Lord never promised His Son or His people an easy way of salvation. How

can the enmity He placed between the devil's seed and the woman's seed, between Satan and Christ, between the world and the church, between the wicked and the righteous, between the flesh and the spirit not lead to conflict?

Where God builds His church on the foundation of the advent proclamation of His Son, Satan will build His temple next door. To the end of time, Satan will wage war against all that is of God and Christ.

We must not minimize the power of Satan. He never stops nibbling at the heels of the church of God. Though he shall not conquer the living Church, he knows that a church "without heels" will be handicapped and severely weakened in battle. As J. C. Philpot noted, "Satan will never keep a child of God out of heaven, but he is able to keep heaven out of a child of God."

Satan is a fallen angel. His powers far supersede our human powers. He is mighty. Under the permissiveness of divine decree, he bruises the heel of the woman's seed. This is the spiritual conflict of all ages: Cain versus Abel, Ishmael versus Isaac, Esau versus Jacob, Egypt versus Israel. Satan's goal is always the same: Wipe out the chosen seed. Witness the command of Pharaoh to destroy all Israel's male children. Witness Egypt's attack at the Red Sea or the plot of Haman.

Witness especially Satan's attacks culminating on Christ. Go to the desert of Judea. There we meet Christ who had stepped away from the water of baptism into the fire of temptation. For forty days, Satan attacked fiercely. He raged to bruise the heels of Christ, to get the Advent Seed to fall. Every avenue of attack was attempted to get Christ's sacred humanity under satanic control.

In Gethsemane, all the powers of hell were unleashed. Crawling as a worm and no man! Bloody sweat! The profound cry and negated answer: "Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me"- oh, what soul-bruising, heel-nibblings Christ experienced! No wonder He spoke to the satanic forces, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53).

The conflict continues at Gabbatha. The purple robe. The crown of thorns. Scourging. Mockery. Slappings. More internal war and bloody bruising.

And then Golgotha. Here Genesis 3:15 reaches its apex. The unfathomable cry rings through the darkened realm of nature, "My God, my God, why hast thou

forsaken me?"

Luther once spent an entire morning trying to comprehend this fourth cross-word, only to arise from his knees, confessing: "God forsaken of God; who can comprehend it?"

And indeed, congregation, it is incomprehensible, eternally incomprehensible, but this much we know: Satan was defeated on the cross, once and for all. "Through death he (that is, Christ) might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). The victory belongs to Christ. Nevertheless, Satan will not admit to being a vanquished foe. He continues to nibble at the heels of Christ's church. Throughout all ages, victory comes through a suffering, bruising way in Christ. Witness the Acts of the Apostles, the early church's persecution, the Reformation and post-Reformation era, the Great Awakening, and times of revivals. The church's most blessed times have also been times of most severe conflict. Tertullian rightly compared the church to a mowed field. He wrote, "The more frequently it is cut, the more it grows." Church history confirms the adage: The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

Today the conflict continues in the breast of each true believer. Bunyan called this conflict, "the holy war." Each believer knows the struggle within between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Oh, what battles between the old and new man, flesh and spirit, nature and grace! Rebecca-like, God's people often feel two seeds within struggling to break forth, causing the cry, "Why am I thus?" The severity of such struggles can better be experienced than expressed. Oh, what struggles with the triple-headed enemy-Satan, world, and self! What doubts, questions, unanswered riddles, unfulfilled promises, satanic bruising—no wonder such souls become a mystery to themselves!

By nature, we live largely struggle-free. We don't know holy battle. With God's people it is different. Dear friend, if God becomes God in our life, Satan shall become Satan, that archenemy of God and of grace, that constant "bruiser" who seeks to avenge day and night. Does he not bruise you severely, dear child of God, at such times as these:

- When he injects blasphemous thoughts into your mind?
- When he then whispers that you cannot be a child of God and have such

thoughts simultaneously?

- When he succeeds to get you to question the truth of the promises of God and of the mercy of that God who has never treated you ill?
- When he seeks to persuade you that you have no lot or portion in the matter of salvation, for you have only begun with the Lord and not He with you?
- When he argues with you that no child of God could be like you—so weak in faith, so corrupt, such a poor example, so hard and prayerless, so foolish and vain?
- When he comes as accuser on the left hand or as an angel of light on the right, seeking to lead you to despair or to presumption?
- When he presents the world to you in fair colors, attempting to move you back into the customs, friendships, and vanities of the world, inch by inch?
- When he presses you to indulge, albeit briefly, in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life?

God's people experience that the greatest enemy in all spiritual conflict is sinful self. Self becomes the chief opponent. On the one hand, the new life desires to live perfectly before God, without sin and blemish; on the other, the old nature is constantly pursuing former paths of living without God, without love, and for self. Oh, what holy battles sometimes wage against self within the renewed heart! Has your own heart ever become your greatest obstacle, greatest plague in spiritual life? Do you know the heavy burden of both hating sin and not being able to purge yourself from it—that burden which Paul unveils so movingly in Romans 7?

Such bruised warriors often fear they are fighting a losing war. Repeatedly they spend all their strength in spiritual struggle only to discover that on *account of themselves* they are sliding down the perishing slope of sin and, if God prevent not, destruction. At such times, spiritual poverty and weakness seem to overcome them. The tempter is following them, bruising and running hard upon their heels. David's cry ascends with groans and pleadings, "I shall one day perish at the hand of Saul." The hand of God is hidden; the brink of hell is visible. Voices within urge the abandoning of all pursuit of God and His grace. Other voices condemn them, and *justly* so. Satan is a liar, but much of what he speaks to their condemnation is all too sadly true. Conscience condemns. The law demands and curses. Divine justice

is unsatisfied.

They are bitten by the seed of the serpent---by Satan, the world, and their sinful nature. They cannot walk without heels. They must fall, must say farewell to self-help. They must die to self. They must sign their own death sentence that God is righteous and just to cast them away forever, In that signing, not Satan, but self, becomes the greatest culprit. It becomes real: *I have fallen. I am polluted throughout. I have chosen death above life, hell above heaven, Satan above God. I have bitten myself.* All seems fatally bruised -all my righteousness, repentance, prayer, humility, worthiness, yes, even my unworthiness. Death is written across all of self.

And yet, the amazing wonder of the gospel is that precisely in this way, that is, through self-condemning judgment, God makes room for the woman's Seed-for the victorious, Advent Christ. Our text concludes, "It (that is, the Seed, Christ) shall bruise thy head." But we will consider this victory in Christ in our third thought after we sing first from Psalter 92, stanzas 1 and 5.

## APPLICATION

### III. Victory Assured in Christ

Satan's heel-nibbling is burdensome, but not fatal. God overrules it for the good of His people. Through surrender lies victory-victory in Christ. For Christ gathers the self-condemned in His shepherding arms. To them, He opens His gospel victory. He says, as it were, "Dear sheep, Satan bruises your heels, but I have bruised his head on your account-in death, in resurrection, and in judgment."

In the first place, Christ bruises Satan's head in His *atoning death*. While Christ's heel, that is, the "lower part" which is symbolic of His human nature, was being bruised on Calvary, He was crushing the head of Satan. The same heel Satan was bruising on Calvary was simultaneously crushing Satan fatally, for on Calvary Christ was making full payment for all the sins of His elect. Let us listen to Hebrews 2:14 again, "Through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

Secondly, Christ bruises Satan's head in His *victorious resurrection*. Satan could not keep the Victor buried. His body could not see corruption. Christ arose from

the grave. He showed Himself alive for forty days and ascended in triumph to His Father, leading captivity captive (Ps. 68:18). He is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father beyond the reach of all the nibbling powers of hell. He is in His state of exaltation; He has the keys of death, hell, and grave in His hand. The church is safe in Christ. His resurrection is a pledge of their blessed resurrection. Victory is assured in Christ.

Thirdly, Christ shall bruise Satan's head fatally and finally in His *final judgment*. On the day of judgment, Satan and his seed shall be cast out forever. Never again shall Satan trouble the Seed of the woman. The Victor will come upon the clouds, seize the old serpent, and cast him eternally into the bottomless pit. The bruising of Satan's head shall then be complete and final. The accuser of the brethren shall accuse no more, All heel-nibblings shall be done away. The militant church shall become the church triumphant. All Egyptians shall be drowned. The elect shall experience in full: "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will show to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace" (Ex. 14:13-14).

Blessed day when corruption shall inherit incorruption (1 Cor. 15:50)! That day shall usher all the elect--beginners and advanced in grace--into everlasting Advent, everlasting Elim. All good shall be walled in; all evil, walled out. Conflict shall be done away. The satanic seed shall be left buried in the grave.

Keep courage, dear child of God. Christ's seed shall not perish. Your Victor cannot fail. His cause is sure. His Second Advent is near. He will not forsake the work of His own hands.

On the other hand, dear unconverted friend, Satan's seed must perish with him. Hell means to be *without* God forever, and to be *with* Satan forever. In hell there shall be no relief from his nibblings, from the agonizing worm that dies not, nor from the evil devices of the wicked one. Terrible shall it be in that day to fall into the hands of the living God! "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (Heb. 2:3a).

To which seed do you belong? Dear congregation, please remember, there is no

third seed, no "in-between" seed. You belong either to Christ or Satan.

"Make haste for your life's sake." You are still in the day of grace, the time of salvation. The Seed of the woman is still offered to you; yes, He offers Himself to you. Pray for grace to receive His gracious invitations and to bow under His Word in holy surrender, Pray that the authentic, Spirit-worked Advent cry may become real in your heart, "Give me Jesus, else I die!" AMEN.