

Conflict
in
Heavenly
Places.

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CONFLICT IN HEAVENLY PLACES.

EPHESIANS VI. 10-18.



THE very blessings of the Church (as in Eph. i. 3) set us into a sort of conflict, which, without such blessings, we should not have. So the Church is subject to more failure than either Jews or Gentiles were, because they were not called to the same blessing. A Jew might do many things that would be monstrous in a Christian, and yet find no defilement in his conscience. The veil that was over the knowledge of God being rent, the light shines out; and the consequence is that this light which has come out of the holy place cannot tolerate evil. Christians are

in a more dangerous position if not walking in the light than Jews. Satan may draw and entice me with many things, which would have no power against me if I were not so favoured. "Be strong *in* the Lord;" here is the place of *strength*. There is no strength but in Christ—I have none at any time, except as my soul is in secret communion with Him, and through Him with God the Father. The direct power of Satan is toward this point, to keep our souls from living on Christ. Put on the whole armour of God; there is no standing against Satan without this. Strength is always the effect of having to do with God in the spirit of dependence.

We see in 1 Sam. xiv. the contrast between Saul and Jonathan, between confidence in God overcoming all obstacles, and self failing with all the resources of royalty. Jonathan clambered up on his hands and feet, confident in God, and the enemies were overcome. Saul, when he saw the work going on, not knowing the Lord's mind, calls for the priest. He had a right intention, but not a simplicity of depend-

ence on God, when inquiring what he should do, and spoils all by his foolish oath. It was said of Jonathan that "he wrought with God." God was with him, and he had strength and liberty, not a humiliation we have often felt, because he wrought with God. When we are walking in dependence on God, there will always be liberty before God. Jonathan knew what he should do, and took some honey, because he went on in liberty, for God was with him, whilst Saul in legality had put himself and the people into bondage.

The word, then, after grace in Christ has been fully shown throughout the epistle, is, "Be strong in the Lord" (ver. 10). We have the privilege here of individual dependence on God. Everything may be dark, but the Lord tells us to be strong. This is always accompanied with lowliness of heart: come what will, when the Lord is rested on we are strong.

We are called to put on the panoply of God, to take it to us (ver. 11-13). And no wonder: the conflict is not with men but with evil spirits (ver. 12). Who but an

unbeliever can overlook or despise them? They are principalities and authorities; they are the universal lords of this darkness; they are spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places. Truly to withstand such we need the whole armour of God; which, remember, is not a question of standing but of practical power, and this in entire dependence.

If we pray, be it observed, without searching the Word, or read the Word without prayer, we may get no guidance, for Jesus said, "If my words abide in you, *ask* what ye will," &c.; without this I may be asking some foolish thing that would not be given. We are to stand against the wiles of the devil, not his power. It is not knowing Satan that enables us to discover his wiles, but the keeping in God's presence. It was always so with Christ, because He was always dependent on God. Stand, having your loins girt about with truth. Truth is never really ours but as the affections are ordered by it. If the soul of the hearer be not in communion with God in the truth he hears, his loins

are not girt with it. The breastplate of righteousness supposes not merely this, but that we have nothing on the conscience (ver. 14). Christ's blood made it good; and walking in the Spirit keeps it so.

Verse 15. The gospel of peace is ours in Christ; but I must have the spirit of peace in my heart, and be sanctified by the God of peace, the soul in communion with God, with Him in the spirit of peace; and without this how can the saint walk as always having peace? He is thus prepared to walk by the Gospel.

Verse 16. Whether I look at the sin that made grace necessary, or at the power which caused me to enjoy it, I may walk in perfect peace against every source of sorrow. Every fiery dart is quenched by confidence in God—the shield of faith. It is as essential for the conflict as for saving the soul. We need to cherish confidence in the grace of God all through.

Verse 17. I hold up my head because I know I am safe; salvation is mine. I must first get that which is internal—that which is wrought in me is power. Before

I use the sword of the Spirit, I must first have the loins girded about with truth—the heart covered with righteousness—the feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and then (the shield of faith being up and the helmet of salvation on) I can take the sword of the Spirit. Nothing is more dangerous than to use the Word if it has not touched my conscience. I put myself in Satan's hands if I go beyond what I have from God, or what is in possession of my soul. To talk with saints on the things of God, beyond what I hold in communion, is most pernicious; to fight without it is fatal.

Verse 18. The word always must deal with ourselves before others, but prayer is the expression and exercise of dependence. If a person asks me a question, and I answer without speaking to God about it—going direct, it will be more likely to lead him from God than to God. When a question or difficulty comes, do we turn to God? We may have turned to God before, and the thing is answered, and we ought to have such power of prayer, that

there would be no difficulty when any circumstance arises. If supplication be thus continual, there would be no occasion to ask Him about particular things when they come before us.

“Supplication in the Spirit.” All acceptable prayer is not, I think, prayer in the Spirit. A wish or desire expressed to God, in all the confidence of a child to his father, is heard, but this is not necessarily “prayer in the Spirit.” It is the power of the Spirit in us looking for blessing as walking in the Spirit of God—that is such prayer; not even a difficulty here when living really in the power of communion. We have that energy of supplication which looks for answers—for all answers, and for myself too—watching thereunto with all perseverance. Suppose you begin the day with a sweet spirit of prayer and confidence in God; in the course of the day, in this wretched world, you find a thousand cares and agitations; but if you are spiritually exercised, alive to see the things of God, everything will be a matter of prayer and intercession, according to the mind of God.

Thus humbleness and dependence should mark all a saint's actions.

Instead of being full of regret at what we may meet with, if we are walking with Christ we shall see His interests in a brother—in the church. What a blessed thing to carry everything to God! The word in verse 18 refers to a man walking in the whole armour.

The apostle took the love of the saints for granted. We also, if walking in the Spirit, can always count on others being interested in our affairs.



