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The Ongoing Challenge Facing the Free Presbyterian Church

"And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this? Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you," Judges 2:1-3.

(The synopsis of a sermon preached in Rasharkin Free Presbyterian Church by Rev Ivan Foster, 9th November 1990)

At a time when peace in the community and how best to achieve it are topics on virtually everyone's lips, and that for a generation or more, it is all too easy for the child of God to forget the war that Christians are duty-bound to maintain. Everyone is for, must be for, peace in these days. So say the false and apostate religious leaders. Consequently, anyone or anything whose language or teaching seems to show any form of militancy must be opposed as evil.

BIBLE CHRISTIANITY

Esposal of Bible Christianity is utterly impossible without a marked degree of contentiousness. That is why the historic creeds and confessions of the Church of Christ contain such vigorous denunciations of the sins of their age. The difficulties attending a faithful adherence to God's Word in an unfaithful age are exemplified in the life of Jeremiah. "Woe is me, my mother, thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me," Jeremiah 15:10. The recent appointment of Cahal Daly to the position of cardinal was heralded by a chorus of syrupy and fawning approval from the leaders of ecumenical Protestantism. His appointment met with 'widespread approval' according to the Belfast Newsletter. Archbishop Eames of the Church of Ireland is quoted as saying 'I have been privileged to know Dr Daly for many years and I have the highest regard and respect for his intellectual gifts, his courage and his integrity.'

Such sentiments are indicative of the general feelings of the ecumenical camp. These sentiments are, however, completely at variance with the teachings of the Protestant creeds. Each one of those creeds denounces Dr Daly's religion as fraudulent and devil-inspired. Such is the willingness of leaders to speak peaceably that they are prepared to sell-out the truth of God rather than move against the spirit of this age.

WAR-LIKE ATTITUDE

It is easy to fail to see that peace and tranquillity on a national level is inextricably bound up with the Christian maintaining a war-like attitude on a spiritual level toward certain matters. In the cause of national peace, resisting evil is just as important as assisting good.

In Judges 2:1-3, the angel of the Lord rebukes Israel for making peace with her enemies and tells her that, in consequence, such peace will lead to continual strife.

The challenge facing the Free Presbyterian Church in the future is to maintain the war against those enemies against whom God expects us to fight relentlessly.

I. THE IDENTITY OF THE ENEMIES

The whole purpose of God for Israel depended upon them deposing the occupants of Canaan and taking the land as their own possession. That could only be accomplished by war. Such action was justifiable because:

A. The Canaanites were the enemies of God. They lived in utter defiance of His law. "Defile not ye your-



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selves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you," Leviticus 18:24. "And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them," Leviticus 20:23. "Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the LORD thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD doth drive them out from before thee," Deuteronomy 9:4.

God was engaged in war against them. "And I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite," Exodus 33:2. Israel was His instrument of war and judgment.

B. The Canaanites stood between them and their inheritance. While they, the Canaanites, lived they could not enjoy their heritage.

C. Alive, the Canaanites posed a terrible threat. Not just a military threat but above all a moral threat. Their 'ways' were a potential hazard to Israel's purity. "When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations," Deuteronomy 18:9. "Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them," Jeremiah 10:2.

Likewise, there are things against which we must fight TODAY because they are at war with God and His truth. Their very existence is a barrier to our enjoyment of our heritage in Christ. To permit them unopposed continuance in our hearts, lives or church would be to leave ourselves open to the most malign influence imaginable.

We must contend against:

1. False doctrine and false preachers. Ecumenism, Arminianism, Charismaticism.

2. False versions of the Scriptures. "As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest (torture, twist), as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction," 2 Peter 3:16. We must earnestly contend against such (Jude 1:3-4). We must be "set for the defence of the gospel," standing "fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries," Philipians 1:17, 27-28. We must "rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith," Titus 1:13.

3. Unscriptural behaviour and practices. Even though this entails rebuking one of high standing and greatly honoured, it must be done! ". . . when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed," Galatians 2:11. So often this requires a very public rebuking which we would naturally recoil from and rather avoid. However, it must be done for the sake of the purity of the gospel and the honour of Christ. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear," 1 Timothy 5:20. (Please read Ephesian 5:1-12).

4. The influence of worldliness and carnal ways. "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," James 1:27. "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless," 2 Peter 3:14.

These are the "Canaanites" against which we must ceaselessly war.

II. AN EXAMINATION OF THE ARGUMENTS FOR PEACE

Peaceful co-existence with the enemy has always had its advocates within the Church of Christ. It is a view that is pleasing to the flesh, the faint-hearted and the feeble of spirit.



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

Such people will quickly point out :—

A. The strength of the enemy. “And the LORD was with Judah; and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron, And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley,” Judges 1:19, 34. The devil and his agents have ever been defiant. They put on a show of defiance against the Lord during His ministry!

B. The usefulness that could be made of them. “And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out, Neither did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron, nor the inhabitants of Nahalol; but the Canaanites dwelt among them, and became tributaries,” Judges 1:28, ‘Why go to the bother and expense of destroying them when they could contribute so much toward our well-being?’ Doubtless this was the argument employed by many. So it is today! There are those who plead for cooperation between the worldly and the believer!

C. The obviously peaceful nature of the Canaanites. This is another argument employed by the compromisers. The Canaanite was quite prepared to ‘dwell’ amongst the Israelites and appear to offer no threat. Judges 1:30, 32-33. The Canaanites were ready to settle down alongside their new neighbours. Why deny them an existence? Is it not their right? Many plead today the rights of the lawless and the rebel. The Canaanite was a deep and unrepentant rebel in God’s eyes and any who treated them as anything other than this were in defiance of God and His Holy Law. They were siding with the enemy.

Such views are :—

A denial of the past acts of God. God had undertaken to fight for Israel and drive out the enemy and had already demonstrated His power on many occasions. “And the LORD your God, he shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the LORD your God hath promised unto you. Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left; that ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them: but cleave unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day. For the LORD hath driven out from before you great nations and strong: but as for you, no man hath been able to stand before you unto this day. One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you,” Joshua 23:5-10.

A denial of the wisdom of God. If placing the Canaanite under tribute was a more profitable means of using him, then God would have commanded it to be done. How often monetary considerations have led to the defiance of God’s Word. The ‘old paths’ have been forsaken because it seems that a more profitable alternative may be found. Such is but the road to ruin for the Church of God, as history shows!

A denial of the omniscience of God. Did God not know better the true nature of the Canaanite? When He described them as wicked was He wrong? But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart,” 1 Samuel 16:7.

A denial of the justice of God. Did not the Canaanite deserve such retribution? Was God a tyrant, as many would claim today? Will we side with critics by abandoning God’s truth?

“Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: and the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: (for all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled;) that the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you. For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

people. Therefore shall ye keep mine ordinance, that ye commit not any one of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that ye defile not yourselves therein: I am the LORD your God," Leviticus 18:24-30. "When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee. Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God. For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the LORD thy God hath not suffered thee so to do. The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken," Deuteronomy 18:9-15.

We side with the enemy against Christ when we cease to war against all that is contrary to His Word!

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF MAKING PEACE WITH THE ENEMY

To man's eye there appear to be many benefits in disobeying God's commands. But man is utterly wrong. No good whatsoever comes from disobedience and defiance.

A. Israel's peace-making activities offended God as will ours. How can man answer the question of Judges 2:2? "And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?"

What possible gain is there in pleasing men at the expense of offending God?

B. They were exposed to a most dangerous influence. "Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it," Deuteronomy 12:30-32. "For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee," Deuteronomy 18:12. "Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God. Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you," Joshua 23:11-13.

C. The judgment of God was visited upon Israel when she disobeyed God. "And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed," Judges 2:14-15. God afflicted Israel by the very people that the disobedient Israelites spared. "Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you," Judges 2:3. Warning of such consequences may annoy some, but such words are kindness itself if it were only but known! "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," Galatians 6:7.

Oh that the Free Presbyterian Church would heed God's words of kindly warning!

IV. THE REWARDS OF WAR AGAINST THE ENEMIES OF GOD.

There is only one war that is truly a blessing to men. That war is 'the fight of faith'. It alone is called 'good', I Timothy 6:12.



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

A. By this means the people of God are delivered from power of the enemy. For the Christian it is 'overcome' or 'be overcome'. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good," Romans 12:21. "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning," 2 Peter 2:19-20. "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" I John 5:5.

B. By war we enter into the enjoyment of our inheritance in Christ. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. . . . He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it," Revelation 2:7, 17. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son," Revelation 21:7.

C. The source of strife is thus conquered and we experience true peace. "And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushanrishathaim. And the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years," Judges 3:10-11, 30. "So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years," Judges 5:31.

Such rest is representative of the 'rest' of Heaven which can be enjoyed only when the last 'enemy', death, is encountered and overcome. Thus is pictured for us the need of conquering the enemies of our souls during our earthly pilgrimage, if we are to enjoy that rest which comes from 'overcoming the world'!

"But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," 1 Corinthians 15:57.