

WHAT IS THE CONFLICT?

Matthew 16:18—And I also, I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my [church], and hades' gates shall not prevail against it.

Ephesians 6:10-12—For the rest, brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the might of his strength. Put on the panoply of God, that ye may be able to stand against the artifices of the devil: because our struggle is not against blood and flesh, but against principalities, against authorities, against the universal lords of this darkness, against spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, we do commit this time into Your hand. We do expect Thee to speak to us. We pray that Thou would give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation to the full knowledge of God. We pray that Thou would enable us to see what Thou hast seen. And we pray that Thou would truly bring us into Thy full victory over all the forces of evil so that Thy plan for Thy beloved Son may be accomplished. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.

We have shared together on this matter of why there is a conflict. We learned that in the very beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, there was no conflict whatsoever. Everything was harmonious, and all creation worshipped God without any questioning. But sadly, one archangel, who had been created in such perfection, who was given such talents, and had such great power, began to think of himself. Pride began to rise in his heart. He was not satisfied with what God had given him. He wanted to be equal with God and take the place of the beloved Son of God. And because of this, he was dismissed from the throne of God. It was during that period that the earth we live in today entered into the Ice Age. It was covered with

darkness, filled with waters, and frozen. As a result of this, everything on earth died.

It would have been very easy for God to put His enemy to death, but He had a better plan. This is what we find in the book of Genesis: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was void and empty” (see Genesis 1:1-2). Thank God, we read how the Spirit of God brooded over this destroyed earth in order to recover it to be habitable. We know that God did this because He wanted to bring man into His creation. God created man in His own image after His own likeness—something God had never done before. He did it because He wanted to use man, who had been created a little lower than the angels, to defeat the enemy and all his devices. Hence, the reason we are here.

Satan has so blinded the eyes of man that we do not realize why we are here. We thought we were here for ourselves. When God created man, He had a noble and glorious aim. He wanted to use us, not only to destroy His enemy, but also to accomplish His purpose concerning His beloved Son. Unfortunately, our forefathers fell into the snare of the enemy and became allies to the enemy instead of overcoming him. That is the reason we are born with a fallen nature which means that we are self-centered, independent, and we live for ourselves.

Thank God, He never gave up that which He had purposed. He sent the second Man into this world—even His beloved Son. He came to be the Man of God’s heart. Throughout His life on earth, He never lived for Himself, did any act out from Himself, or spoke any word out of Himself. Throughout His life, He denied Himself, took up His cross, and followed His Father. During His life, He defeated all of the temptations and threatenings of the enemy. By His death, He put the god of this world out of the world. He took all the enemy forces into captivity and made a show of them on the cross. In other words, His

victory is absolute. He obtained His victory, not as God, but as man, fulfilling all that God had intended for man.

Jesus came to save us and then bring us to Himself. As a result of this, we have become allies of God, and we are now on God's side. Because of this, the enemy began to assault us and attempt by every means in his power to weaken us so that we will not become the vessel that can be used by God to defeat His enemy.

THE CONFLICT WE ARE INVOLVED IN TODAY

Now I would like to ask this question: What is the conflict that we are involved in today? What is the nature and the character of our conflict? I often feel that we as Christians have had a wrong concept. When we were under the yoke of sin, we had no hope whatsoever, and we were heavily burdened. Thank God, our Lord Jesus said: "Come to Me, all ye who are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest" (see Matthew 11:28). Before we came to the Lord Jesus, we all experienced such a situation. However, when we come to the Lord Jesus, we find that what He has promised is true, and He gives us rest. The burden of sin falls away. Our sins are all forgiven, and the fear of death is gone. Not only that—and even better—He has given us His own life. We are born again into the kingdom of God.

We have all experienced the burden of sin falling away and finding ourselves walking, as it were, in heaven. However, this is when we begin to have a wrong concept because we think that everything will now be rosy, and we will be carried to heaven in a sedan chair. There will be no more conflict, tribulation, or suffering. We expect a smooth sailing into heaven. What a surprise when we find that this is not so! A conflict comes in or a tribulation comes upon us. When these things come, we begin to feel that living a Christian life is very difficult. How we sigh, murmur, and blame God for everything! We wonder why, after we are

saved, that the Lord Jesus, who promised to take care of us, has not done so. Actually, He has cared for us because we read in His word that He has even numbered our hairs (see Matthew 10:30; Luke 12:7). And if He has numbered our hairs, is there anything that He has not considered about us? We are in the very heart of His heart. There is no question about that; but strangely, we find that we are still in conflict or in a battle. There is the battle for life in each and every one of us.

WHY IS THE BATTLE STILL GOING ON TODAY?

So I would like to ask another question: Why? I feel that there are two opposite reasons. One is that formerly we belonged to the enemy and were his allies. Therefore, he would not trouble us. But once we are saved, we become his enemy. Actually, the conflict is not between us and the enemy; the conflict is between God and Satan. However, because we are now on God's side, quite naturally we become Satan's enemy. He can no longer attempt to do anything to God because he is already defeated. Hence, he turns all his anger towards those who belong to God.

You will recall in the book of Revelation how the church at that time was so dead that Satan left her alone. In that vision in Revelation 12 we find a woman clothed with glory and in travail to bring forth a child. Even though the red dragon was waiting before the woman, he did not devour her because she meant very little to him now. In a sense, that woman represents the fallen church. Because the church is asleep, the enemy can rest knowing that she will do him no harm. So what is the dragon waiting for since he is not going to devour the woman? He is waiting for the manchild that is to be born, because Satan knows that when he is born, it will be the beginning of his end. That manchild is to be God's vessel to bring the enemy down. Thank God, when the manchild is delivered, immediately he will be raptured to the throne. After that it is said that the

enemy, the red dragon, turns his wrath upon the woman, and God makes provision for her.

The Enemy is Trying to delay his Destruction

We realize that this is the way the enemy has always worked. In the very beginning of the church, his interest was to break down the church. But when the church has fallen, he looks for those who come out of the church—a remnant or the overcomers—because that will affect his fate.

That is one reason we, who are the Lord's and to whom the Lord has promised every protection, are in the conflict. All the wrath of the enemy is upon those who belong to the Lord. He knows that one day he will be finished; therefore he is using delaying tactics. He is trying to delay the date of his destruction somewhere in the future.

God Wants to Mature the Bride

Then we find there is another reason. Why does God allow such things to happen to us if He has already won the victory? Why does He leave something for us to finish? It is similar in nature to a war when the decisive battle has already been fought and won and the enemy is defeated. After that, there will be the routing out of the enemy who will be completely wiped out. In a sense, this is what is left for us to do. We do not fight the decisive battle because it has already been fought and won. The Lord Jesus said on Calvary's cross: "It is finished. The work is done, and the battle is won." But God leaves, as it were, a residue of the enemy to His church to finish up what Christ has already accomplished.

We can liken it to the time God led the children of Israel into Canaan, He had already promised Canaan to the children of Israel, and we know that whatever He promised,

it was as good as done. In the sight of God it is done because He has no time factor; everything is present. But to us, everything is future. As far as God is concerned, when He promises, it is done. When the children of Israel entered into the Promised Land, they had to fight for every inch of the land. In other words, they had to put their feet down on their portion of the land. Wherever the sole of their foot stood, it was their possession. This is the way of the Lord. We know that the victory has already been won. The inheritance in heaven has been given. But it is the will of God for us to put our feet down. Wherever the sole of our foot steps, that becomes our possession.

So we find this is another reason God permits conflict in our Christian life—He wants us to learn how to war. He wants to mature us. He wants to discipline us. He wants to see the life in us exercised and growing into maturity in order that we may be fit to be the bride of His beloved Son. We *must* be like His Son. We *must* be transformed and conformed to His Son. But in order to do that, conflict and tribulation have to do the work.

We find in Romans 5 that after our Lord Jesus had accomplished our salvation, it says that tribulation gives birth to endurance; endurance brings in experience; and experience brings in hope. Hope will not be in vain because the Spirit of God will fill us with His love. So we can see that God has a reason for leaving some battles, some remaining forces, or some foes so that we may be able to wipe them out until the work is done. We find the same thing in II Peter 1 where it tells us that we must add one thing to another: After we have faith, we add virtue, patience, endurance, love, and love for all that we may enter into the kingdom with abundance and not just be barely saved.

We realize that the enemy means evil, but God means good. He will complete and perfect us as He did with Joseph. Joseph's brothers were envious of him and sold him

into Egypt. How great was the suffering that Joseph passed through! Thank God, he believed in God and was faithful to Him. In due time God raised him up to be the second in command in that great Egyptian Empire—and was even able to save his brothers. What a wonderful strategy of God this is! Let us not murmur when we find ourselves in trouble and conflict. Thank God, He is using the enemy to complete us as well as using us to defeat the residue of the enemy forces.

THE NATURE OF THE CONFLICT

Now we would like to consider the nature of the conflict that we are going through today. The apostle Paul tells us that our warfare is not against flesh and blood. As we live our Christian lives in this world, we are often surrounded by people of this world and those who are the Lord's, who are dear to us. Oftentimes, the enemy will use the people of the world and even those who are the Lord's as his instruments to make trouble for us and cause conflict in our lives. If we do not know the wiles of the enemy, it is likely that we will turn our eyes upon these people as our enemies. We may even turn on those who are our dear friends, our family members, and even our fellow workers or fellow believers. Somehow the enemy will try to use flesh and blood to cause problems and troubles for us. When we are under such an attack, how easy it is for us to look at the instruments that the enemy uses to trouble us instead of remembering that they are only being used by him with permission by God. The real enemy is not there; he is behind the scene.

The apostle Paul tells us that we know the wiles of the enemy. We are not fighting against flesh and blood; we are fighting against the one who hides behind all these things. The enemy is so clever. He knows how to maneuver and

how to do things that will trap us. Do not be deceived by him.

First of all, by all appearance as we continue to live as Christians and are trying to follow the Lord, we will discover how the world will tempt and attack us. We will see how the enemy will use fellow believers, family members, friends, and all kind of situations to trouble us. Do not be deceived because we ought to know that our warfare is not against flesh and blood. Now I do acknowledge that it is easy to say these things; however, when we are in those kind of situations, how often we are blind! We try to resist, fight against, and consider them as our enemies, and thus fall into the trap of Satan.

We say again that our battle is not against flesh and blood. When we are following the Lord, the enemy tries by every means to put hindrances along the way. Sometimes he tries to persuade with sweet words. Sometimes he tries to threaten us. If he can tempt us, he will tempt us. If he cannot tempt us, he will persecute us. This is what we find throughout the ages. Let us remember one thing: we are not really his target. His target is something bigger and broader than us.

THE TARGET OF THE ENEMY IS THE CHURCH

What is his target? His target is the church. This is the reason our Lord Jesus said: "I will build my church upon this rock, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." The Lord *is* building His church. And when the Lord is building His church, all of the gates of Hades will be open. The full force of the enemy will be poured out upon the church that the Lord is building because he knows when the church is built, that is the end of him. So his wrath is really centered upon the church that the Lord is building.

Again I have to say: why is the church today not the direct target of the enemy? It is because the church has fallen into the world; therefore, it can do no harm to the

enemy. The church that the Lord is building is not what man tries to build. I often hear people say that so and so is a church builder. There is no such thing. The Lord Jesus Himself said: "I will build My church." Whatever man builds is not His church. Often we may hear some people say, "This is my church, built by me." Sooner or later, it will fall because it is no match for the enemy. All the gates of Hades may come against the church that Christ is building, but it cannot overcome it. Instead, the enemy will be overcome. The enemy's target is not you and me personally; it is the church that the Lord is building, and He is building today with you and me. That is the reason why we are involved.

THIS BATTLE IS A FIGHT OF FAITH

We thank the Lord that this battle is a fight of faith. The nature of our conflict is the good fight of faith. We know that faith is believing something that Christ Jesus has done on Calvary's cross. This is where our faith casts its anchor. We surely cannot find faith in ourselves. Oftentimes, we try to build up faith and hypnotize ourselves by saying, "I believe, I believe, I believe," as if faith will rise up in our heart. This never works. Faith is casting our anchor outside of ourselves. We cannot believe in ourselves nor can we trust in ourselves in this spiritual conflict. If we are trying to defeat the enemy by our own strength, by our own wisdom and power, we will discover very quickly that he is much bigger than we are.

The apostle Paul said that we are not fighting against flesh and blood; we are fighting against principalities, those who rule over an area. We are fighting against authorities, those who are in authority. We are fighting against the spiritual forces of darkness. They control the darkness. They throw darkness around. We are fighting against the spiritual power of the enemy.

Our enemy is much stronger than we are. We are no match for him. Thank God, he has already been overthrown. Our Lord Jesus has already taken him captive and made a show of him openly by the cross. How can we fight this battle? Not by ourselves.

The apostle Paul said, “Be strong in the Lord and in the might of his strength.” That is the only way to fight this good fight of faith.

I always remember the story of a little girl who believed in the Lord Jesus and was happy in Him. One day a man came to tempt her and said, “Little girl, I understand you believe in the Lord Jesus.”

She said, “Yes.”

Then he asked, “Are you happy in the Lord?”

And she answered, “Yes, I am happy in the Lord.”

He asked, “If one day the enemy comes and knocks on the door and asks to come in, what can you do? You are just a little girl; how can you stand against that big enemy?”

The girl thought for a while, and she answered, “I will tell the Lord Jesus; go and open the door.” And the Lord Jesus opened the door.

When the enemy saw Him, he said, “Pardon me, I knocked at the wrong door.” And he fled.

This should be our strategy. Unfortunately, when conflict comes into our lives, we tend to resist it and depend on ourselves. We struggle and fight against these conflicts. Eventually we are defeated. The only secret of victory is to be strong in the Lord and in the might of His strength.

THE ANOINTING OF THE SPIRIT

In the beginning of the church on earth, as we read in the book of Acts, we see our Lord Jesus ascending to heaven. Before He went, He laid the foundation of the church through His life and death. Before He left, He said: “It is

finished.” The foundation was there, and everything was done; therefore, He returned to heaven. After He ascended on high and sat down on the throne of His Father, does He no longer have anything to do? What is He doing today?

I remember the story of an old lady who believed in the Lord Jesus, and she wanted to be baptized. However, according to the custom of that time, she had to be questioned by the elders. When the elders began to question her, she was asked one question: “What is the Lord doing in heaven?” The old lady thought for a few minutes and said, “The Lord is looking down from heaven upon me trying to find some fault in me.” Of course, she did not pass.

We know that is not what the Lord is doing there. After the Lord ascended on high, He was anointed by His Father, and the ointment fell upon His head but it did not remain there. The ointment came down onto the beard, down upon His clothes onto His feet. Our Lord Jesus was anointed Lord and Christ as Peter declared on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:36). It is because He was anointed as Lord and Christ that the ointment—the Holy Spirit—began to flow down on the day of Pentecost. One hundred and twenty individual believers were gathered together. They were the best Christians you could possibly ever gather together. There was never a gathering of better Christians on this earth. Think of those who were there—the apostles, Mary and the brothers of our Lord, those others who returned and waited, praying in the upper room.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down from the Head to the body. The one hundred and twenty individual believers, who were the best Christians at that time, were baptized into one body. That is the real meaning of Pentecost. It is not the sight and sound which are emphasized today. The real meaning of Pentecost is the Holy Spirit coming down and baptizing those who believe

in the Lord Jesus. But it was not only on the day of Pentecost—the one hundred and twenty and the three thousand—but even today, whenever anyone believes in the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit has baptized him into the body of Christ. That is the meaning of Pentecost—being members in the body of Christ and given grace and gifts to minister to Him.

In the beginning of the church, we know that glorious things were spoken of them. How the Lord added to them day by day; how they were totally delivered from self-possessiveness, so much so that nothing belonged to them. Not only did they belong to the Lord, but everything they had belonged to the Lord. The Lord was given every right over them and all they had. What power! Within thirty years the gospel was preached to the end of the world, which at that time was the city of Rome—the center of the world.

THE ENEMY TRIED TO DESTROY THE CHURCH

Ananias and Sapphira

We can see that as the Lord was building His church, right away the enemy was busy. How he tried to destroy the church by every means that he could use, and as he looked among those believers he found Ananias and Sapphira. People gave up their properties to feed those who remained in Jerusalem, so Ananias and Sapphira wanted to have the same fame and be praised by the brothers and sisters. They sold their property but they kept part of it for themselves. They brought the money to Peter, who asked: “Is this all?” And they said, “Yes.” We see that the discipline of the Holy Spirit was very quick because His presence was so real and living. Immediately, they were smitten to death.

Murmuring in the Church

Nevertheless, the enemy did not give up. In chapter 6, we read of murmuring that had begun. We know that on the

day of Pentecost, the people came for the feast. However, after they were saved, they remained there. They had no homes, no profession, they had to be fed, and they needed a place to live. The believers opened their homes and began to feed them.

There were two kinds of Jews at that time—the Hebrew and the Hellenistic Jews. The Hebrew Jews were those who remained in the Promised Land, and the Hellenistic Jews were those who left the Promised Land and lived in Gentile cities. The twelve apostles were familiar with the Hebrew Jews and their home situation; but they were not familiar with the Hellenistic Jews who came and dwelt in Jerusalem. And the supply for these widows was neglected, but not purposely. When this happened, there was murmuring, and this is always the beginning of trouble.

I often say, “We are not afraid of problems because if problems are rightly solved, they are blessings.” Therefore, when the murmuring began, the Holy Spirit immediately gave the apostles spiritual sensitivity. They could sense something was not quite right. Spiritual discernment was greatly needed in that day—as well as today. They realized something was not right, and because of their spiritual discernment, everything was put right in a glorious way. The apostles told them to choose among themselves seven men full of the Holy Spirit to be those who took care of the food, and it left the apostles free to devote themselves to prayer and ministry of the word. Whom did they choose? The majority of the Christians in Jerusalem were Hebrew Jews and the rest were Hellenistic. The seven chosen by the church were Hellenistic Jews except one who was probably a Hebrew. You can see behind that there was no jealousy, no enmity, but love overflowing. The Hebrew Jews did not worry about their widows being neglected. They were willing to let the Hellenistic Jews be elected. When this happened, the church grew, and the word of God spread.

The Dividing of the Hebrews and the Gentiles

The enemy will never give up. He has—and will always follow the church. He tried to cause problems by dividing the Hebrews and the Gentiles. Some Pharisees converted to Christ and insisted that the Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the law even as they did. That nearly broke the church asunder. Thank God, in that Jerusalem council (see Acts 15), the Lord prevailed.

Even though the enemy will never give up, we have to remember that the enemy's target is really the church. It is because you are a member of the body of Christ that you have become his target. He will try every means to keep you from being matured. If he can keep all the believers of Christ as babies, then his days will be prolonged. Once there are enough matured believers, his days are numbered. We *must* realize how serious this is.

Let us not be afraid. Let us not be fearful because our paths are not so rosy. There are many conflicts and many problems that will come to us of all kinds. However, let us remember that behind it all is the enemy.

PETER'S DISCIPLINE BY THE LORD

Now we will give some illustrations. We know that among the disciples Peter was the one who always stood out. He was an extrovert which means he liked to talk. He was always the leader among the disciples of the Lord. We know from the Scriptures that of all the disciples, Peter was one who stood out as being disciplined by the Lord Himself. Oftentimes, I feel: "Peter, if you would only shut your mouth."

Peter was Used by Satan to Try to Keep Jesus from Going to the Cross

In Matthew 16, Peter made that public confession of the Lord Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God by the

revelation of the Father. Our Lord Jesus said: “Simon, son of Jonah, this is not something given to you by man, by flesh and blood. Nobody can reveal this to you; it is My heavenly Father who has revealed Me to you” (see v. 17).

Ah, Peter was lifted to the third heaven; but the enemy always comes in when we are lifted up. In the same chapter, the Lord began to reveal to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem to be betrayed and then crucified, but on the third day, He would rise from the dead. Out of Peter's good will for our Lord Jesus, he laid hold of Him, shook him, and said, “Lord, never! You do not need to do that. You can have the kingdom without the cross.” Was he thinking of the Lord or of himself? Peter probably thought: If the Lord should go to the cross, where will I be if it is not also to the cross? Outwardly, you find it was natural love, but behind the natural love, it was the enemy working. Thank God, our Lord Jesus had such spiritual discernment that we do not have. He knew it was not Peter but Satan, and He turned around and said: “Get ye behind Me, Satan; you are not mindful of the things of God but of the things of man” (see v. 23).

If we had been there as Peter and speaking such things, and the Lord said: “Satan, get behind me”; would we continue with the Lord? Probably we would say, “Good-bye; that’s it.” But not Peter; he stuck with the Lord.

The other disciples began to say that the word was too hard (see John 6). They said, “How can we eat You; how can we drink You and have life eternal? This is too hard.” And they left. Then the Lord said to the twelve who were following Him: “Do you want to go also? If you do, you may.” And Peter said, “Lord, we have followed You. You have the words of life. Where can we go? You are the Son of God, we will stick with you.”

The Lord Deals with Peter's Impatience

Throughout Peter's life as a disciple of the Lord, we find case after case how the Lord dealt with him severely. We know that he was a professional fisherman, and he fished by casting nets rather than using a hook. Once the temple tax collector came to him and said: "Did your Master pay the temple tax?" He said, "Oh yes;" without even thinking. He went into the house and intended to tell the Lord about it, and the Lord said to him: "Peter, who pays the temple tax—the sons or the strangers?" (see Matthew 17:25b). Of course, Peter understood that the sons should not pay any tax because it is the temple of God, and the Lord is the Son of God. The Lord was gracious to Peter and said: "I will pay it and for you also. Go and fish. The first fish that comes up, open its mouth, and there will be money to pay the temple tax for you and for Me." Peter went fishing. In my life, I have only fished one time and I lost patience because the fish would not come. I can imagine Peter sitting there thinking: "Come quickly," but the fish did not come. Finally, after what probably seemed like a long time to him, the fish came. What a lesson of patience! Peter was not only an impatient person, he was an impulsive person. But the Lord was training him.

***Peter is Dealt with for His Boasting of Going into Death
with the Lord***

Another time Peter boasted to the Lord and said: "If You go to death, I will go with You. Even if no one else will go, I will!" How Peter trusted himself! The Lord said, "Peter, you will deny Me." The Lord dealt so drastically with Peter in order to make him that vessel that could stand up and preach the first gospel message on the day of Pentecost and three thousand were saved.

PAUL THE PERSECUTED

When we look at the life of Paul, we find that he was a persecutor. After he met the Lord on the road to Damascus, he became the persecuted until his martyrdom.

DEMAS WHO LEFT PAUL IN DIFFICULT TIMES

We also think of Demas who had a good beginning. He was with Paul, working together with him. At the last minute, when things began to be too difficult, he left Paul and went to Thessalonica. That can also happen.

THE BATTLE IS NOT FLESH AND BLOOD

I believe we are all aware that we are in a conflict. It is not a battle against flesh and blood; it is a spiritual battle, and we are the battleground. The enemy is trying to get us, not because we are that important, but because that is the only way to delay his destruction. There is no surprise. We should not expect trouble, but if the Lord should allow these troubles, if He allows the enemy to use all kinds of reasonable and unreasonable means to come upon us, let us not forget that we are not fighting against flesh and blood. We are fighting against principalities, authorities, spiritual darkness, and spiritual forces of the air.

We are not fighting by ourselves or by our own strength. We are fighting the good fight of faith, trusting the Lord, relying upon the Lord, and allowing the Lord to work out His victory in us and through us. This is the nature of the conflict. The apostle Paul said, “We are those who know the wiles of the enemy.” May the Lord help us!

Dear Lord, we do commit these scattered words into Your hands and pray that the Holy Spirit would illumine Thy word to us that we may see clearly the conflict we are involved in. Teach us how to be strong in the Lord and in

*the might of His strength to the glory of God; in His name.
Amen.*