

Lesson Four

THE SECRET OF THE EVANGEL

When we read in the Old Testament how God led the children of Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness and destroyed their enemies as well as offenders and rebels among His people, we may wonder why He does not do this today. Even when the Lord was here on earth and during the times of the apostles there were miracles and swift executions of judgment from the hand of God. We may often wonder why God does not seem to do anything about the wickedness of our day. Why do His people often suffer for their faithfulness, and why does He allow His truth to be covered up?

It is one aspect of the evangel which has become covered up which answers these questions. This is the conciliation which tells us that "God was in Christ, conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses to them" (2 Cor.5:19). It is God's declaration of peace. "For Christ, then are we ambassadors, as of God entreating through us. We are beseeching for Christ's sake, 'Be conciliated to God!'" (2 Cor.5:20).

The Greek word for *ambassador* appears only in one

other passage, and there it is translated "conducting an embassy." In Ephesians 6:18-20 Paul requests vigilance in prayer "that to me expression may be granted, in the opening of my mouth with boldness, to make known the secret of the evangel, for which I am conducting an embassy in a chain, that in it I should be speaking boldly, as I must speak." In Jeremiah's day it took boldness to speak of coming affliction and wrath. In our day it takes boldness to speak of this peace which God has established.

The secret of the evangel is opposed by the "spiritual forces of wickedness among the celestials" (Eph.6:12). They do not want us to think of God in this way. They prefer that we look upon God with dread, as the angry Avenger of all wrong. Peace is one of God's greatest accomplishments through the blood of the cross, and it is one of the greatest spiritual blessings which the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, has blessed us with (Eph.1:3).

HUSHED IN TIMES EONIAN

This glorious secret was kept hidden in the times which are past (Rom.16:25), but now it has been made known through Paul's ministry. Nevertheless, it remains hidden to most people. The conciliation has been established, but very few have actually received it. Even believers may doubt God's achievement and strive to make their own peace with Him. When we worry and fret and hate and despair we are forgetting the secret of the evangel, and we are showing that we do not really believe God when He says He is not reckoning our offenses against us. The way of peace is to be "glorying . . . in God, through our Lord, Jesus Christ, through Whom we now obtained the conciliation" (Rom.5:11).

It is a great privilege for us to be living in this era in spite of its evil, for the secret of the evangel has been made known, and the blessings of the conciliation are available to comfort us and give us peace. This was not possible in Old Testament times.

With the ministry of Paul to all nations, God's special association with Israel came to a close, and the secret of the evangel was made known. Paul writes that this “casting away” of Israel made possible “the conciliation of the world” (Rom.11:15). Yet in the future Israel will become “My people” once again, and for a time the conciliation will be withdrawn as the events described in the book of Revelation take place. In the light of this we can say with Paul, “Lo! Now is a most acceptable era! Lo! Now is a day of salvation!” (2 Cor.6:2).

CLASS PROJECTS

1. How can we explain the apparent “silence of God” in the present era when there is so much evil and enmity against Him?
2. Who do we represent as ambassadors? What is the policy which we are to present to the world?
3. Look up all the occurrences of the words *conciliate* and *conciliation* (pages 56 and 57 of the KEYWORD CONCORDANCE). Which passage is not dealing with the conciliation God has established?
4. Discuss the meaning of *conciliation* and its relation to *reconciliation*.
5. Suggest some contrasts between the ministries of Jeremiah and Paul.

Concordant Publishing Concern
P.O. Box 449
Almont, Michigan 48003
