

SHOULD A CHRISTIAN GO TO WAR?

THE very question well-nigh answers itself. "Blessed are the meek; blessed are the peacemakers." "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil" (Matt. 5: 5, 9, 38, 39). "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath" (Rom. 12: 19). "Let your moderation (your yieldingness) be known unto all men" (Phil. 4: 5). "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2: 15).

As we contemplate the character of Him who was "meek and lowly in heart," by whose "meekness and gentleness" the apostle appeals to us (2 Cor. 10: 1), the path of the follower of Christ is made very plain. The angels celebrated His advent on earth by, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." His public ministry and attitude toward men was one of reconciliation: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5: 19).

There was opposition stirred up by His walk and testimony, but it was the opposition of evil to good, of darkness to light. To opposition and violence on man's part our Lord submitted with perfect lowliness: "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth." All power was in His hand, and He could have called for "more than twelve legions of angels," but He submitted Himself to man's designs when His hour was come, saying, "But this is *your* hour and the power of darkness" (Lk. 22: 53).

That the purpose of God was thus to manifest man's absolute enmity, and to effect redemption in that very connection, emphasizes what we are dwelling upon. For there are two sides to the cross—human hatred and divine judgment. It is of the former only that we speak. The latter's depth and terror is seen in the thick darkness that enveloped our Lord "from the sixth hour to the ninth," when the cry of anguish is wrung out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Then, the rent veil, the vacant tomb, the ascended Lord seated at the right hand of the majesty on high, declare that love and judgment, righteousness and peace are united to save the sinner who believes in Jesus.

"I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14: 2) in the many mansions in the Father's house—"that where I am, there ye may be also." This is the "blessed hope" before the believer, which makes the coming of the Lord not the dreaded appearing of a law-giver and judge, but of "the *Saviour*, our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body" (Phil. 3: 20, 21). "And so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4: 17). Is it any wonder that the Spirit-taught cry of each ransomed soul in response to His Word, "Surely, I come quickly," should be, "Amen; Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22: 20)? Rightly understood all this answers the question of this paper.

After His ascension, according to His promise our Lord sent down the Holy Spirit to dwell in the believer, and in the Church as a whole. He it is who gives power to the child of God to represent his absent Lord. He makes possible in us the fulfilment of our Lord's words: "As my Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (John 20: 22).

In the two great fundamental facts of which we have spoken, we have the three great essentials of Christianity: (1) The Cross of Christ, by which we have redemption. (2) A glorified Christ, who is soon coming for His people. (3) The Holy Spirit in the believer to make good these great truths, and to empower us to live according to them. There are certain great results which flow from these at which we must now look.

(1) The Cross is not only the witness of a perfect redemption for us, but the declaration that in *God's sight* our standing as natural men is ended. "Our old man is crucified with Him (Christ)" (Rom. 6: 6); "I am crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2: 20); "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" (Gal. 6: 14). In other words, the believer stands as a new man, in a new relationship to God and the world. He has now peace with God, and the link that bound him to the system called "the world" has been broken.

(2) As Christ is risen, so is the believer "risen with Him," and as such is exhorted to "seek those things which are above" (Col. 3: 1). We have been "quickened together with Christ, raised up together, and made to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2: 4-6). Need we wonder then that God declares, "Our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven" (Phil. 3: 20), that we are "partakers of the heavenly calling" (Heb. 3: 1)? And does not this truth explain our Lord's words, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17: 14, 16)?

(3) And as these truths are absorbed in the Christian's heart they create a distinct and practical separation from the world. For instance, he

does not find his friendships and intimacies with the world; he has different objects, affections and hopes. He instinctively seeks his companionships with those who have "obtained like precious faith." To the world he may appear to have lost interest in what concerns most men; but he has found new interests. He has become, as it were, a stranger in the world, with a message to give it—of the love of God, His grace to sinners, and to entreat men to be reconciled to Him. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5: 11).

Growing out of this relationship, we find the path of the believer clearly marked. He is not set to "improve the world." He does not enter politics therefore, nor vote, but acts as having but one testimony to give—"repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20: 21). He is to be kind, gracious, sympathetic, and as he has opportunity "to do good to all"—but one great fact governs him: *he is not of this world, even as Christ is not of this world.*

Let us ask a few questions in the light of these facts: Would the Lord Jesus bear arms?

Would He strike the blow which would launch a sinner into eternity?

Would He smite one of His own with the sword? "He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked" (1 John 2: 6).

Our Relation to the Powers that be.

But let us look carefully at another side of the truth we are considering. What is to be our attitude toward the government under which we live? What would our Lord's attitude be?

The apostle tells us; "I exhort therefore, that *first of all*, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and

giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2: 1-4). Two main subjects for prayer are suggested here: the enjoyment of peace, and the salvation of souls. So long as the day of grace lasts, we should entreat our God to guide, sustain and help the rulers of the land. What privileges we enjoy in this highly favored country. Even where Christ is not personally known, there is a measure of the fear of God, the opportunity to read the open word of God, and to turn to Him. Surely, then, it becomes us to pray for our rulers.

In particular in times of crisis, the people of God should be interceding for those who have the difficult task of government. Let it be remembered that with God prayer counts more than armed hosts, nor does He forget the entreaties of His saints in times of war, that His will may be done; that multitudes of precious souls on fields of battle may turn to Christ; that the bereaved and sorrowing may be comforted and blessed; and that a righteous peace (so far as it can be so) may soon come. The wise ruler values the sincere prayers of God's people.

"Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God . . . For rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil . . . Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For this cause pay ye tribute also . . . Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor" (Rom.

13: 1-7). In brief, this holy portion of God's word teaches obedience and submission to the existing government. Not merely as fearing wrath, but for conscience sake, the child of God is not to resist authorized power; he is to be "law-abiding," to pay taxes, tribute, and render all honor to those in authority.

"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers . . . Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Pet. 2: 13-17). These are the "good works" of a believer which "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." Paul speaks of his gospel testimony while a prisoner in Cæsar's court (Phil. 1: 13). And, let it be noted, they were not "good governments," but such as that of a Nero, with tyrannies and cruelties which made them fearful.

But, it may be asked, How far is submission and obedience to go? We answer, God's word puts no limit except one: When man's word or command goes counter to the word of God. When there is a clear issue between human authority and God's, there can be but one answer, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5: 29). "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (Acts 4: 19). With this one exception the child of God is to submit to the authorities in every thing; but his soul, his conscience belongs to Christ. *He must represent Him.*

Questions Answered.

We shall seek now to answer briefly questions as to special passages of scripture.

"Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's,

and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22: 15-22). *Answer.*—The connection shows it was a question of tribute, which has already been noticed. Pay tribute, but do not forget the claims of God.

Did not Paul claim Roman citizenship and appeal to Cæsar (Acts 16: 37; 22: 25)? *Answer.*—He was a free-born Roman citizen, and simply bore witness to the violation of the law in scourging him uncondemned. He was before Cæsar's tribunal, and claimed to be judged there rather than unlawfully murdered by the Jews.

"Lord, here are two swords" (Lk. 22: 35-38). Did not our Lord tell His disciples to take the sword? *Answer.*—The whole passage shows He was impressing them with the need of faith in Himself. He was to be taken from them, and *to outward appearance* they would be thrown on their own resources. But surely He would have them realize that, though absent, He was still for them. His answer, "It is enough," shows He did not mean they were to take literal swords. When Peter attempted to defend his Master with the sword and cut off Malchus' ear, the Lord healed the man and said, "They that take the sword shall perish with the sword." The cup His Father had given Him to drink, He would take.

The soldiers' question to John the Baptist (Lk. 3: 14). *Answer.*—John answered them on the plane they were. They could not have understood Christian truth, but they could understand that they were not to foment insurrection, and to be content with their wages.

What about the Old Testament? Were not the children of Israel to exterminate the Canaanites, and to fight with their enemies? *Answer.*—It was a different dispensation. God was judging the un-

godly nations for their sins, and setting up an earthly kingdom. *Now* He has enthroned His Son in heaven, and is preaching grace to men, beseeching them to be reconciled to God. In the future, when the Lord shall appear to judge the world, He shall smite them with His sword (Rev. 19: 11-21); but that time is not come. Grace reigns now, and the servants of Christ must *preach* grace, *live* grace, and beseech men to be reconciled to God. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (see the whole passage; 2 Cor. 10: 3-5).

What then is the Christian to do? *Answer.*—He is to obey the Government wherever he can without disobeying the word of God. There are many ways in which he can do this without misrepresenting Christ. There are lines of duties, as clerical, ambulance service on the field of battle, ministering to the wounded and dying in the hospitals—ministering *Christ*, as we minister to the body. Above all, let us put from us any spirit of cowardice—whether it be physical dread of danger, or moral cowardice which fears mockery, and to confess Christ and His word.

May the Lord keep His beloved people in an attitude of prayer, of deep and sincere exercise, of simple communion with Him through His word and Spirit. May He bless and guide our rulers, giving to them wisdom in a day of crisis for the world. May this nation and all nations be brought to repentance toward God, with humiliation and prayer. May multitudes be brought to Christ, to know Him as their Saviour, in this day of God's patience.

"The time is short." "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

S. R.