

# **The Teaching of CHRIST**

By

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## **PART III**

### **THE TEACHING OF CHRIST CONCERNING THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

#### **CHAPTER SEVENTEEN**

##### **THE REDEMPTIVE PROCESSES – THE CONFLICT**

**“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you”**  
(Matthew 5:10-12).

**“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved”** (Matthew 10:16-22).

**“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it”** (Matthew 10:34-39).

**“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed**

**tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn” (Matthew 13:24-30).**

**“He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels” (Matthew 13:37-39).**

**“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).**

**“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).**

**“Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar” (Matthew 23:34-35).**

**“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me” (John 15:19-21).**

**“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).**

THE proclamation and propagation of the Kingdom of GOD in the midst of abounding anarchy must necessarily produce conflict. That needs no argument. It has been demonstrated in human history first by the experience of the Hebrew people; and now for two millennia by the experience of the Christian Church; but centrally by the life of CHRIST, and by the fact of His Cross. Because the Church of GOD is to-day the instrument of that proclamation and propaganda, she must still share in that conflict.

Our present theme is that of our Lord's teaching concerning that conflict, or rather concerning her part therein during the present age. There are other aspects of the conflict between anarchy and authority, between the forces of evil and those of righteousness, with which we are not now

dealing; other aspects of the conflict in the future, with which we are not now concerned.

We are now considering the conflict of the Church in the interest of the Kingdom, as revealed in the teaching of our Lord.

- We shall consider first the fact of the conflict; and
- Secondly the nature of the conflict.

From the opening of His more formal propaganda in Galilee, which was followed almost immediately by the enunciation of His ethic in the presence of His own disciples on the mount, throughout the whole of His ministry and in all His teaching, it is quite evident that our Lord recognized this fact of conflict.

- It was clearly indicated in the closing beatitude of the great Manifesto when He spoke of the blessedness that rests on such as are persecuted for His sake.
- It was plainly foretold in the first commission given to the twelve, which was largely local and limited, and which was ultimately superseded by the larger commission beyond resurrection.
- He explained the fact in His special parabolic teaching concerning the Kingdom.
- He recognized it when at Caesarea Philippi He spoke for the first time of His Church, and of His Cross
- He announced the fact of the continuity of that conflict to His enemies in the last solemn words that He spoke to them.
- Finally, in the secret and sacred sanctity of those hours in the upper room, when talking to His own disciples, and delivering to them His final comfort and charge, He distinctly foretold the inevitability of this conflict.

Evidently, then, as our Lord looked through the age to its consummation, He saw His people engaged in ceaseless conflict with the forces that were opposed to Himself, and are opposed to the Kingdom of GOD. Let us glance at these words of JESUS, in each case a little more particularly. The words selected from the Manifesto constituted the final double beatitude. Let us remind ourselves once more that they were spoken to His disciples, who for the moment were realizing the Kingdom by submission to the King.

When in Galilee the multitudes gathered about Him, our Lord left the crowds in order to reach them more perfectly; He then gathered about Him His disciples; and to His own subjects He uttered the great Manifesto. It is perfectly true that the crowds followed and listened; but it is equally true, and never to be forgotten, that the Sermon on the Mount was spoken to His Own disciples, and was intended for them, and for them alone, in the first place.

He was speaking therefore to these men in whom the Kingdom ideal was realized, so far as it was possible at the moment, by the fact that they had crowned GOD's appointed and anointed King. In speaking to these men in whom the Kingdom ideal was realized in a measure, He was speaking to the Church that was to be.

Our previous meditation endeavored to show how Kingdom responsibility is now vested within the Christian Church. In speaking to them, with a backward look, recognizing all that had been

wrought in the ancient Hebrew economy by faithful souls, He said:

**"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"** (Matthew 5:10).

Then looking at the men who were close to Him, and referring to the new Kingdom movement which would issue from His own ministry and work, He said: **"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you"** (Matthew 5:11-12).

In these words our Lord recognized the fact of perpetual opposition to the Kingdom of GOD, and the consequent suffering of those who, loyal thereto, proclaim it to men. The prophets of the old, and the messengers of the new economies, alike experience suffering resulting from the opposition of evil to the Kingdom of GOD.

When sending out His twelve disciples to the fulfillment of their first apostolic mission, He sent them to preach the Kingdom. He spoke to them of the immediate difficulties, and told them that they would suffer for His sake; declared to them that presently the difficulties would become even greater; that they would be sent out as sheep in the midst of wolves, describing with remarkable and detailed accuracy the actual experiences through which they passed between our Lord's ascension and the destruction of Jerusalem. Then looking on through the following centuries, He said, **"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword"** (Matthew 10:16).

So He recognized and emphasized, in the hearing of the men whom He was first sending forth with the great message of the Kingdom, the fact that the proclamation of the Kingdom must issue in strife, in conflict, and in suffering.

The parabolic teaching of the thirteenth chapter of Matthew is full of the recognition of the fact.

The element of conflict runs through all the parables, revealing not final things concerning the Kingdom, but processes leading towards the final things. As we read the parables we discover all through two forces opposed to each other. In one of the parables this particular teaching is made clear; the work of the enemy is that of the planting of darnel in the field of GOD; the planting of that which is an almost exact imitation of wheat in its earliest stages, but which, in later development, proves to be its opposite.

In the words spoken at Caesarea Philippi, declaring that He would build His Church, we find that His first word concerning the function of the Church recognized the conflict that is to come. **"The gates of hell shall not prevail against it"** (Matthew 16:18). In that sentence the Church's warfare was revealed in a flash; and the condition of fellowship with Him in that warfare was laid down in His subsequent words: **"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me"** (Matthew 16:24).

When speaking to His enemies, after the final woes had passed His lips, He said, **"I send unto**

**you prophets, and wise men, and scribes”** (Matthew 23:34); not, I have sent them to you, but I will send them to you, a declaration of His determination to persist in the proclamation of the Kingdom for their sake through a new ministry. I will send to you prophets, speakers for GOD, wise men who shall be winners of souls, scribes who shall be interpreters of the law; but you will scourge them, crucify them, fling them out. Thus here again He declared the fact of the persistence, both of the King and His enemies through the coming days; the fact, therefore, of the continuity of the conflict.

Finally in those last discourses in the upper room, He told His disciples that the conflict would be inevitable; but ended everything with the word of courage, **“Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world”** (John 16:33).

This rapid survey of some of the outstanding words of JESUS concerning this conflict cannot fail to make some very definite impressions on the mind.

The first is that of the unusualness of this conflict.

This is marked in the fact that everything was entirely unlike warfare as we have known it in the history of the world. The methods of the soldiers of the Kingdom are not those of earthly strife. They seem to do nothing. They seem to offer no resistance. In no teaching of our Lord concerning these men is there any description of a campaign on their part which appears to be likely to match the campaign of those who are opposed to them. Indeed, we are impressed by the perpetual and persistent defeat of the King's army. They are always persecuted. They are always suffering. They are constantly crucified. They are as sheep in the midst of wolves; and in that one master figure of speech the whole position is revealed. That is not warfare as men understand it, and yet that is the characteristic of the conflict as described in the teaching of our Lord.

Over against that we must place another fact which is equally impressive, the abounding confidence and persistent hopefulfulness of His outlook. Never a tremor of doubt; no suggestion of ultimate failure; the perpetual declaration of continuity of suffering and defeat; and yet this, buoyantly, hopefully, confidently anticipated!

This optimism is not the optimism of One Who is hoping against hope, or Who is blind to the facts of the case. As we study the teaching of the Lord, we discover that, according to His conception of the conflict, the soldiers of the Kingdom who offer no resistance are by that fact offering resistance. The soldiers of the Kingdom, who are constantly being scourged and crucified and driven out, are by that fact walking triumphantly after their overcoming Lord, Who Himself did overcome by this process of defeat.

As a matter of fact in these very methods that astonish us are the secret sources of strength, and they constitute the sure way to the ultimate victory. By defeat they are to win; by dying they are to live; by crucifixion they are to come to crowning; by non-resistance they are to resist; by taking no sword of the flesh in their hand they are to master all such as use the sword of the flesh.

Now with these general impressions upon the mind, let us examine a little more closely the nature of this strange conflict as it is revealed to us in the teaching of our Lord; no longer referring to particular passages, but endeavoring so far as we are able to deduce from the whole teaching a statement as to the nature of this conflict.

We may summarize the whole story in the simplest way by declaring that in this conflict the weapons of the forces against the King are carnal; while the weapons of the forces that fight for the King are spiritual.

The root principle of anarchy is that of Godlessness. That is a word so common in our speech, and so easily uttered that one almost trembles lest its profound significance and its many-sided application may be lost sight of. All the forces that are against the King are against the King because they are Godless, they put GOD out of account. Godlessness in His own day, as in our day, is not necessarily that of speech, but Godlessness in the actuality of the deepest inner life. It may be that the name of GOD is reverently spoken, while yet those naming it have no dealings with GOD, save that of antagonism to His claims. All the forces revealed to us in the New Testament, in the actuality of our Lord's conflict, or in the revelation of His teaching, are forces resulting from, and acting in response to the inspiration of Godlessness.

Let us go farther, and enquire, what is the consciousness of those who are acting in answer to the impulse of their actual Godlessness? The consciousness is ever that of love of self, of self-consideration; and consequent hatred of all that opposes self-interest.

There are many manifestations revealed in the New Testament, and many more in the course of the ages; but underneath everyone is the love of self, consideration of self, self-interest. What shall we eat; what shall we drink; wherewithal shall we be clothed? Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. These are words of the simplest, perpetually quoted, yet they are flaming in revelation; the emphasis is always upon the self-life, the self-interest, the self-pleasure. Forgetfulness of GOD, consideration of self; dethronement of GOD, enthronement of self; and wherever this is the master passion of the life, then hatred of all that opposes follows; hatred of GOD, hatred of the prophets who speak in His name, hatred of the letter which reveals His law; hatred of all which, coming from Him, would set restraint upon human life in order to realize it in all its beauty and in all its fullness within His great and gracious Kingdom.

Such forces, inspired by Godlessness, conscious of the desire for self-pleasing, and of hatred of all that hinders, fling themselves against the Kingdom of GOD, and against the messengers of the Kingdom of GOD; and they do so by employing the weapons of the self-life, - lying, murder, and hypocrisy.

Of course that is to strip a great many things of false nomenclature, and to name them according to what they really are; for in a day like this we look back to the early days of persecution, and then we look around and say, all the forces of opposition have retired. No, they have but changed their method of attack, they have accommodated their opposition to the more subtle forms which have been made necessary in the age in which we live.

Lying to-day is more refined in its methods, but it is none the less prevalent. Murder in the olden

days, in the early experiences of the Church, was the actual killing of the saints; but now men indulge in those subtler forms of murder, revealed in the ethic of JESUS, in which He declared that hatred in the heart towards another man is equivalent in the economy of GOD to the murder of the man. Hypocrisy persists though it has changed its masks.

All the weapons of evil in this warfare are carnal; lying, murder, and hypocrisy mass themselves, organize themselves, against the Kingdom of GOD, to prevent its coming, to refuse its claims.

Turning to observe the attitudes, the consciousness, and the weapons of the soldier of the King as they are revealed in the teaching of our Lord, one word will suffice to define that out of which everything else springs; the root-principle is Godliness, the return to GOD, the recognition of GOD, the remembrance of the fact of His rule, the submission to that rule, the yielding of all to Him. Out of that everything springs.

There can be no fight on behalf of GOD on the part of men who are Godless. No man has any power to bring in the Kingdom of GOD, who excludes the Kingship of GOD from his own life. It is quite possible for men to pray in multitudes, "**Thy Kingdom come,**" but the prayer rises no higher than where the sound expires, unless the Kingdom has come in the life of the men who pray.

A recognition of that fact affords an explanation of the perpetual terms of sifting and searching severity of which our Lord made use, in the days of His personal propaganda. How the multitudes flocked after Him, and how He held them back! How easily they would have crowned Him upon the basis of the fact that He was able to provide them with bread; and with what solemn resolutions of purpose He declined to be so crowned! He declared that if men would come after Him, to His Kingdom, and the establishment of the Kingdom of GOD, they must begin by such submission to Himself as should indicate their return to GOD, not theoretically but practically. Godliness, as opposed to Godlessness; that is the nakedness of the fight from beginning to end.

And further, when we look at these soldiers of the King, and when we listen to the King, we discover that their consciousness is in direct opposition to that of the forces against the King. On the one hand love of self and hatred of all opposing. On the other, love of GOD, and infinite compassion for men.

This at once shows how impossible it is for the soldiers of the King to fight with the weapons which are employed by their enemies. Consciousness of self and hatred of all that opposes will use carnal weapons; but love of GOD, and compassion for the men that oppose Him, will decline to use such weapons. The weapons of the soldiers of the King are truth, salvation, and sincerity. Truth opposes itself to all lying; a consuming passion to save enters into conflict with hatred; and sincerity challenges hypocrisy.

Now let us observe the forces as they come together in the actuality of conflict.

As to the root principles, Godlessness confronts Godliness; it is armed with sword, and fire, and rack, subtle and devilish means of causing pains to others; but Godliness is armed with truth and

love and sincerity, the instruments of saving others. Mark them in conflict. Which will be victorious? Let me quote in this connection a great word of the apostle Paul in writing to Timothy. Apart from its profoundest values, it throws light on this matter also. "**And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory**" (I Timothy 3:16).

That is the story of the triumph of Godliness. How did Godliness reach that triumph? By defeat; by being bruised and wounded and murdered; by the appalling mystery of the fact that when He was reviled He reviled not again; that He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth. By that non-resistance in the power of the carnal, He resisted in the power of the spiritual; and came to a twofold triumph, past and ultimate.

Or look at the actuality of the conflict as between the consciousness of the forces that oppose, and the consciousness of the soldiers of the King. On the one side, self-consideration, which hates all that opposes; on the other, that self-emptying which loves even such as oppose. Which is to win? In the heart of the classic passage in the writings of Paul on love, there flames and flashes one statement with exquisite and never-fading beauty; the ultimate word of all the argument is this, "**Charity [Love] never faileth.**" Yet how it seems to fail, but it never fails! Love is bruised, and wins by its bruising. Love is left upon the highway, destitute, tormented, afflicted, and by that willingness to be left, triumphs over every force opposed to it, "**Charity [Love] never faileth**" (I Corinthians 13:8).

Next consider the opposition as between the weapons that are carnal and those that are spiritual.

In his second letter to the Corinthian Christians Paul said, "**For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ**" (II Corinthians 10:3-5).

These are the victorious weapons, those that deal, not with external manifestations, but with the inspirational centers of human life; casting down imaginations, dealing with the underlying reasons of things, and capturing these and turning them to good. Thus the ultimate victory of the Kingdom is to be won.

The conflict is persistent, and the way is still the same.

The Church of GOD has always failed when she has turned to other weapons, and to carnal methods. CHRIST's first words to His disciples, after He had spoken of the Church, were terrible and stern words, but necessary, "**Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men**" (Matthew 16:23).

Our Lord had spoken of His Church; of building it; of its victory over all forces including death itself; of His disciples as holding the keys of the Kingdom; and all the words were the words of a

propaganda moving towards victory. Then He had told them that the way to the crown was the way of the Cross. And Peter, spokesman of the Church through all time, save as she is indeed taught of the Spirit, said, **“Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee”** (Matthew 16:22).

In those words he protested against the idea that in order to the establishment of the Kingdom there must be no carnal fighting; that all the fighting must be the cessation of fighting; that the dynamic of resistance is the end of resistance. That be far from Thee, said Peter. No Church will be built that way. The gates of Hades will never yield to such methods. The keys of the Kingdom cannot long be held by such ideas - And JESUS said, **“Get Thee behind Me, Satan,”** thou art measuring My campaign by the ways of men, hoping to establish My Kingdom by the way that other kingdoms have been established, all of which perish and fail. **“Get thee behind Me, Satan.”**

And at last, under the olive shades of Gethsemane, speaking to the selfsame man, our Lord said, **“Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword”** (Matthew 26:52).

The history of the Church from that day until now demonstrates the truth of that word of JESUS. A little over three centuries ago, men in our own country took the sword and removed the king; but the king came back. Men at the same time suffered the loss of all things, and struck no blow in defense; but they won the victory of spiritual freedom which abides until this hour. The coming of the Kingdom of GOD will never be by the sword. Defeat is still our way of victory. The loss that a man suffers for the Kingdom of GOD is the gain of the Kingdom in the place of his suffering, and the assurance of the ultimate triumph. Not by any carnal weapons are we to fight this warfare, not by any means which men employ for the establishment and the strengthening of earthly kingdoms, will this Kingdom be brought in and established. Lowell saw far indeed when he sang:

“Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,-  
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,  
Standeth GOD within the shadow, keeping watch above His own.  
Count me o'er earth's chosen heroes, - they were souls that stood alone,  
While the men they agonized for hurled the contumelious stone,  
Stood serene, and down the future saw the golden beam incline  
To the side of perfect justice, mastered by their faith divine,  
By one man's plain truth to manhood and to GOD's supreme design.

“By the light of burning heretics CHRIST's bleeding feet I track,  
Toiling up new Calvaries ever with the cross that turns not back,  
And these mounts of anguish number how each generation learned  
One new word of that grand Credo which in prophet-hearts hath burned.  
Since the first man stood, God-conquered with his face to Heaven upturned.

“For Humanity sweeps onward: where to-day the martyr stands,  
On the morrow crouches Judas with the silver in his hands;  
Far in front the cross stands ready and the crackling fagots burn,  
While the hooting mob of yesterday in silent awe return  
To glean up the scattered ashes into History's golden urn.”

- The Present Crisis

**“I came not to send peace, but a sword“** (Matthew 10:34).

**"The weapons of our warfare are not carnal"** (II Corinthians 10:4)

**"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world"**  
(John 16:33).

~ end of chapter 17 ~

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