

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

HARRY BOWERS, EDITOR

7444 GRIMSBY CIRCLE, HARRISBURG, N.C. 28075

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WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS

We live in a world at war. Our grandparents went through the First World War, our parents and many of us as youngsters witnessed the Second World War, Korea, the Viet Nam War, the Cold War, and Desert Storm are all wars most of us were a part of or can remember. Now the War on Terror, centering on Afghanistan and Iraq, has invaded our lives and affected the life style of the whole nation. Add to these two seemingly unwinnable wars: the War on Drugs and the War on Poverty. All these wars have been and are physical and political in nature. There are other wars raging among us. We are in a verbal war, a war of words, a clash of ideologies. For example the word "compassionate" to some means helping a poor unmarried woman have an abortion or rescuing a seal from ruthless Eskimos or whales being destroyed. To others being compassionate requires that we block abortion clinics and prevent a murder of the unborn, and let Eskimos and whalers provide for their families. To some people "freedom" means the right to display graphic photographs of sexual immorality in prominent museums at taxpayers' expense. To others freedom means the liberty to do what is right. There is a war being fought in the educational system. Battles are fought over curriculums, sex education, drugs, condoms, safety, vouchers, dress codes, illiterate graduates, sports, school funding, teacher capabilities and various other subjects too numerous to mention. Other wars are fought today over the family (radical feminists and gay rights claims and traditional family advocates). The media and Hollywood has consistently waged war on Christianity, frequently ridiculing and disparaging Christians as they never do against any other group of Americans. Wars are fought over popular culture (movies, television, music videos, inter-net pornography, free expression and entertainment). The environmental wars (the 90's emerged as the "green decade" and "global warming" has become the up to date topic of discussion). There are wars over corruption in the political and business world (bank bailouts and heavy taxes and unreasonable regulations, CEO's salary increases in the millions and workers pay is minimal while the company goes bankrupt, Unions and political corruption in high places).

Fundamentalist preachers assign the reason for these wars to the fact that we are living in the "end times" when the power and activity of Satan, preparing the world for the anti-Christ, will be so great that nothing can save us except the so-called "rapture" which will take us out of it all. Perhaps these culture wars have been brought about because we are a people under the judgment of God. In Scripture "judgment" means more than punishment. In judgment God comes near to discriminate and make distinctions. (Picture Jesus walking among the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2-3). Judgment is pictured as a winepress (Lam. I:15; Isa. 63:3; Rev. 19:15) but also as a winnowing fork (Mt. 3:12). When God judges He separates the wheat from the chaff, the sheep from the goats. II Peter 3:10 teaches that in judgment the earth and its works will be *discovered* (literal translation). Times of judgment reveal the hearts of men and forces

them to a crisis of choice. When people make choices they are drawn into conflict with those who make different choices. To live in a time of judgment is to live in a time of conflict.

Matthew 21:43 records the fact that the kingdom would be taken from the Jews and given to a nation producing the fruit of it. In I Peter 2:9 this nation is said to be the church. The church, then, is God's primary agent in history. There are but two kingdoms (nations) in the world...the nations of the world represent the kingdom of darkness while the church (God's new man (Eph.2:14,15) represents the kingdom of His dear son. The kingdom of darkness was established by Satan when he lied, deceived man, and brought sin and death into the world. The kingdom of God was established by Christ in his life, death, resurrection and ascension. A new order of things can be experienced by his church now, and will be experienced fully at his appearing.

There is no doubt we face vicious attacks from powerful enemies in high places, yet in the midst of battle we are blessed. Despite war we give thanks. We already feast with Christ at his table (I Cor.10:16) although we hunger and thirst after righteousness...we already are citizens of heaven (Eph. 2:6) although we live in the world...we have already come to Mount Zion, the New Jerusalem, the city of the living God (Heb. 12:18-24) although we groan for the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:24)...we are already new creatures in Christ (II Cor. 5:17), although we have not yet put on immortality (I Cor. 15:50-57). The ministry of Christ has opened the way into heaven for us and by the Holy Spirit we can now enjoy all the blessings of God's presence. Christ's work completely revolutionized the whole world and ushered in a radical reversal of humanities' way of living. He achieved a revolution in three ways: 1. He achieved a revolution in the heavens...Satan once had access to Heaven (Job 1, 2), he was in a position of power, now Christ has been exalted and is now reigning (Eph. 1:9-23) and will reign until the last enemy is defeated (I Cor. 15:25). 2. Christ achieved a revolution in the sanctuary by opening the true heavenly sanctuary. Leviticus shows man's exclusion from God's presence, but now the veil has been rent (Mt. 27:51) and heaven, the true tabernacle, is opened to us (Heb. 9 10). 3. He achieved a revolution on earth. In the Old Testament God's work centered on one nation, Israel. In the New Testament God has created a new man (Eph. 2: 15) who is to make disciples of all nations. But there is a war raging. We are in the midst of mortal conflict. We, the church, represent the Almighty upon the earth as His holy nation. The church is God's answer to the world. A fact un-known to the world and the church as well, is that the church is God's primary agent in History and whatever He does in the world He does it through His church.

The Biblical church constitutes the greatest nation on the earth. It is the greatest empire that ever existed (Dan. 2:44). And it is the last great hope of mankind. It will overcome its enemies and this Holy Nation will endure forever. It will defeat all enemies within and without in this warfare.

The church, however, has not lived up to this high calling. For the most part the modern church is obsessed with trivialities. They have permitted the idolaters of power and mammon to set their priorities, and convince us that the really big issues confronting the world are political and must be solved on a social level. David Wells in his book *God in the Wasteland* states it in these words: "The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is not inadequate technique, insufficient organization, or antiquated music, and those who want to squander the church's resources bandaging these scratches will do nothing to stanch the flow of blood that is spilling from its wounds. The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is that God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His judgment is too benign, His grace is too ordinary, His gospel too easy and His Christ too common." Early in the warfare the Christian became misdirected. James asks "What is the source of wars and fightings among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You fight and quarrel..." (James 4:1, 2). They were waging war, but it was a war among themselves. Has this not been the history of the church and does it not continue with us today? The Civil War brought on an irreversible conflict among some of Northern and Southern churches, and following that German rationalism found its way into our colleges and seminaries resulting in war between liberalism and conservatism, the result of which is with us until this day. In recent years we have seen conflicts over such things as Bible translations, prophecy interpretations, church involvement in political affairs, segregation of the races, the move to marry Christianity and Psychology, gay marriages and the ordination of homosexuals in the ministry. Perhaps the biggest battle in the close of the last century was over the charismatic movement with its emphasis on speaking in tongues and healing. This war has about come to an end because of compromising peace treaties that conservative churches have embraced because they have been overwhelmed with the popularity of the movement, which has no trouble drawing great crowds, and this, after all, is the mark of success in the modern church. This led to the biggest war of the century, the war between traditional and contemporary worship. So the battle has raged over contemporary or traditional music, whether we use an organ or a guitar, song books or overhead projectors, shaped notes or no notes, short sermons or no sermon, suits and ties or sport shirts and sneakers. So the war rages over worship, but the sad point of it all is we are fighting a war that has nothing to do with what is revealed in the Word.

At this point let's return to the question James asked a warring church: "What is the source of wars and battles among you?" The words *battles* and *wars* are used to describe not only physical wars (Luke 14:31) but also spiritual conflicts (I Tim. 1:18; II Tim. 2:3 and I Pet. 2:11). This spiritual conflict is described in Ephesians 6:12,13: "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, having done everything to stand firm." D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his book *The Christian Soldier* states: "There is nothing that is more urgently important for all who claim the name of Christ, than to grasp and understand the teaching of this particular section of Scripture. The world today does not believe in a spiritual realm at all. It is even doubtful about the being of God; it has no faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; still less does it believe

that there are 'Principalities and powers, the rulers of darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness even in the heavenly places'. Such words are meaningless to the world; it has no appreciation of their value or importance." We might add that neither do the majority of churches know and believe this.

Satan is described as "the prince of the powers of the air, the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). The "Powers of the air" are said to be "Rulers, Principalities, Authorities, Powers, Dominions and Thrones" (Eph. 1:21, 3:10; Col. 1:18). It is with these spiritual powers that Christians contend (Eph. 6:12). That these powers are active upon the earth is seen in Daniel 10:13, 20,21 where Michael the Archangel is said to be contending with "the Prince of Persia, and the Prince of Greece." This terminology refers to supernatural beings at war with the Christian in the spiritual realm. The New Testament epistles continually set forth the Christian life as a life of conflict and a deliberate engagement in what the Apostle Paul calls "the good fight of faith" in which he urges Christians to "stand fast in the faith". (Eph. 6:11-18; I Cor. 16:13; I Tim. 6:12; II Cor. 10:5). Jude 3 appeals to Christians to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints". The "faith" is the body of truth, elsewhere called the "gospel" which is belief in God, in Christ the son of God, his life on earth, his death for sin, his resurrection for our justification, his ascension for our representation before God, our own resurrection when he appears a second time apart from sin to reign, with his saints on the earth.

George Eldon Ladd in *A Theology Of The New Testament* describes this spiritual warfare in these words: "Satan, the archenemy of God, is the ruler of the authorities of the air (Eph. 2:2), the god of this age (II Cor. 4:4), whose objective is to blind the minds of men and women that they should not apprehend the saving power of the gospel. He is the tempter who seeks through affliction to turn believers away from the gospel (I Thess. 3:5), to hinder God's servants in their ministry (I Thess. 2:18), who raises up false apostles to pervert the truth of the gospel (II Cor. 11:14), who is ever seeking to overwhelm God's people (Eph. 6:11, 12, 16), and who is even able to bring his attacks in the form of bodily afflictions to God's choicest servants (II Cor. 12:7). Satan's main objective is to frustrate the redemptive purposes of God." However, the strength and ability of The powers of evil are limited. Jesus has "rendered powerless he who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). And he "appeared that he might destroy the works of the devil" (I Jn. 3:8), and "cast out the ruler of this world" (Jn. 12:31) by "disarming the rulers and authorities and triumphed over them" (Col. 2:15). In doing all this he "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (II Tim. 1:10). If this is true why is there so much evil in the world and why does Satan seem to have the upper hand? Why is the church so ineffective and are the prophecies of victory really true? Evidently we have missed the message of the New Testament: Psalm 110: The Lord said to my lord, 'sit at my right hand until I make your enemies the footstool of your feet.' The Lord will stretch forth your strong scepter from Zion saying: 'rule in the midst of your enemies'." Jesus sits at God's right hand while his people extend his reign. He is reigning and we have part in this reign. Satan's doom is sure; God will crush him under the feet of the saints" (Rom. 16:20).

