

The Conflict of Two Ages

by Allan Halton

Christians are called to live according to the order of an age to come, nourished by the passions of the life of the ages, not by those of the flesh, and this means conflict with this world.

Scripture: Mark 10:29, John 6:53, John 12:25, John 16:8, Hebrews 1:5, 1 John 2:15

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

Allan Halton preaches about living the life of the age to come in this present age, emphasizing the need to die to self and sow unto eternal life. He highlights the importance of being sold out for Christ, avoiding worldly traps, and being willing to suffer and face persecution for the Gospel. Halton urges Christians to partake in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, emphasizing that true life is found in eternal life through partaking of Christ. He challenges believers to live according to the order of the age to come, even if it means conflict with the world, and to focus on eternal realities rather than earthly pleasures.

Transcript

We Christians in this present age are to live the life of another age. We now have that life of the age to come--eternal life--in seed form, and the more we fall into the ground and die as the original Seed Himself fell into the ground and died, the more do we sow unto eternal life, the more do we release that eternal life to break forth. Christ and His apostles demonstrated that we are to be totally sold out to this, totally given over to this, and ever wary of the traps and snares that would rob us of it. When we end up living a merely natural earthly life and are captivated by what John calls "the pride of life," just living a worldly life enjoying earthly and worldly pleasures, we end up the greatest of all losers. Jesus time and again warned that those who love their lives in this age would end up losing it.

But at the same time He promised that those who in this age lose their life for His sake and the Gospel's... will find it.

This is clear. The lot of those who in this age take up their cross and follow Jesus--our lot will be suffering and persecution in this age. We Christians in western lands very deeply need an awakening in this area. This is what the Christian life and walk is all about. "Yea, and all they who will live godly in this present age shall suffer persecution" (Tit. 2.12). Even so. But in the midst of it we have the assurance that the eternal life we now have in seed form will burst into fruit... later.

"...Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the age to come life eternal" (Mk. 10.29,30).

What is Jesus talking about here? I believe it can be summed up by saying that whatever losses we suffer from an earthly perspective are more than made up by the family of God we are now born into, and the house of God we now become a part of--even though we are also granted a portion of their sufferings. But while that is our lot here, we have the wondrous promise: "...and in the age to come life eternal."

What is life, then? All that this present world has to offer? That is not real life. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12.15). In fact Jesus said, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood ye have no life in you."

That is quite the statement. According to Jesus, it is only eternal life that is real life. Jesus said, "Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life..." That is real life--partaking of Christ, eating His flesh, drinking His blood.

But what are the implications of eating His flesh and drinking His blood? This is surely to partake of His sufferings, as He showed the disciples when He broke the bread and passed around the cup during the Last Supper. To eat His flesh and drink His blood--this is the "fellowship of His sufferings."

But what is the ultimate lot then, or the one who eats His flesh and drinks His blood? "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up in the last day" (Jn. 6.53,54).

How deeply we in our land, and in our day, need an awakening to this realization. This is what the Christian life and walk is all about in this age--the fellowship of the sufferings of Jesus Christ. It is our calling to live in this age according to the order of an age to come, to live the Life of the ages here in this present life. And this is going to mean trouble for us in this world, for it means conflict with this world. For these two ages are diametrically opposed to one another. While living in this age, we are to be nourished by the passions of the life of the ages--not by those of the flesh. We are to be feeding on eternal things, heavenly things--even Christ Himself--and not earthly sensual things. We don't underestimate the power of temptation. But let us know that God has the grace we need to overcome it all. "In the world ye shall have tribulation," Jesus said. "But be of good cheer: I have overcome the world." He overcame the world so that by His Spirit we too could overcome the world. And so when the pull of the world is strong and we are tempted to give ourselves to the pursuit of diverse lusts and pleasures and fill our lives with earthly things of one sort or another, let us earnestly seek to lift up our eyes to eternal realities, and to Him that dwelleth in the Heavens--and take up our cross!

Think of the beauty of the Life that the Son of God manifested when He walked right here on the ground in sandals--the Life of the ages, manifested in this present evil age. He was a totally different kind of Man. He was a spiritual, a heavenly Man. He dwelt in a heavenly realm even while He was here on earth. By His Spirit we can do the same. The Son of God manifested in this age the Life of the ages.

He was crucified for it.

But if this was the lot of my Master, what shall my lot then be? Let me weigh this soberly. My beloved Master was crucified by a world absolutely at enmity against God. Can I then live as its friend?

Two ages met in the Cross of Christ. Two spirits--the spirit of this age, and the Spirit that is of God--met at the battle line, and the one destroyed the other. Apparently it was the spirit of this age who triumphed. But no. In the Cross of Christ, two princes strove for control. Two gods contended for worship. And when the Son of God on the Cross with arms outstretched and head bowed worshipped His Father to the end, that other god was utterly vanquished. That other prince was deposed.

"Now is the judgment of this world: now is the prince of this world cast out." Let us be assured that what God accomplished in the Cross of Christ we shall yet see completely fulfilled in this troubled little planet of ours--through you and me. You and I have a part in that. Jesus said that in His going away, He would send the Comforter to us. "And when He is come He will convict the world concerning sin, and concerning righteousness, and concerning judgment. Concerning sin, because they believe not on Me, concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye see me no more, and concerning judgment, because the Prince of this world is (has been) judged" (Jn. 16. 8-11). So, we have a part in this. This is our calling in this present evil world. Not to live here seeking to gain all it has to offer--whether in goods or in honours. But rather to be those in whom the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, can make manifest that ancient conviction of the Cross, and cause that ancient judgment to be completely meted out.

Two spirits. Two gods. Two kingdoms. Two ages. We in this age are not to be conformed to this age, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. As we do this, and live now according to the age to come, it will certainly cost us our lives in this world. But great shall be our reward in the age which is to come--a reward that is not just for our own benefit, if you understand what I am saying.

Oh that our eyes might be opened, then, to see that it is the age to come that is the important one! How earthbound we are at times! Our belly cleaveth to the dust, as the psalmist mourned. Yet the writer of Hebrews tells us, "For not to angels did he subject the world to come, of which we speak" (Heb. 1.5). Here, for world he uses yet another word, oikoumenen, meaning habitable world, the home of mankind. And so we have a little glimpse here. There is more before us, far more, than there is behind us. There is much more to come in the purposes to God. The age to come will involve a world inhabited by men. And God is preparing some in this age to whom the world to come shall be subjected; and they shall rule over it in light as the powers of darkness have done in this present age of darkness. It is a very great honour, this, a very high calling... though it means a very deep cross. Let us take up that cross, beloved! How long shall our fellow man be held in bondage of darkness? Do we love our Lord enough--and our fellow man--to take up our cross? Oh, how blinded we are at times, and live on such a low plain, a merely temporal and earthly plain. Eternal and heavenly verities are dim and distant things to us. Instead we covet our neighbour's beautiful property... or our brother's blessing.

Beloved, these things ought not so to be.

Dear Lord, anoint our eyes with eyesalve that we might see! You paid for us a debt we could not pay ourselves, and because of this, our salvation is not merely our own. We are debtors to all men. Keep us focused, then, on eternal realities, lest our lives, which are but a vapour, which are but for a moment, be lived in vain. Keep us centred on your will... which we know will always result in footsteps on an eternal pathway, regardless what earthly circumstances we find ourselves in. Keep us mindful of the coming age, dear Lord, and wary of this present one in which we live, as it is written, "Love not the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone should love the world, the love of the Father is not in him, because all that is in the world, the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever"

(1 Jn. 2. 15-17).

And so help us nurture the faith, dear Lord Jesus Christ, that sees Him who is invisible, that looks not upon the things that are seen, the things that are temporal, but on the things that are unseen--eternal things. Help us, Lord--we need your grace in this--to not be deceived by a world that is fleeting, transient, temporary. Help us to take you seriously, and in this world take up our Cross, and follow you. For we believe Your words, dear Lord, when you say, "He that loves his life shall lose it, but he that hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (Jn. 12.25). Amen.

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