

The Confederacies of Men and the Judgments of God

by John Gifford Bellett

The sermon explores the nature of human confederacies against God and the inevitable judgments that follow, urging believers to maintain separation and faith in the truth.

Scripture: Genesis 11:1, Matthew 16:1, Revelation 17:14

Topics: "Separation From World", "Faithfulness To God"

Description

John Gifford Bellett preaches about the contemplation of hostile associations among men and nations as depicted in various Scriptures, warning about the spirit, purpose, and working of civil or worldly associations that can influence the character and history of the world. Bellett highlights the dangers of confederacies formed against God, drawing parallels from the confederacy at Babel and the opposition faced by Jesus from diverse groups. He emphasizes the importance of separation from worldly alliances and the need to remain faithful to the truth of Jesus amidst the alluring advancements of the world, symbolized by the unclean spirit returning with seven others to a swept house. Bellett urges believers to maintain holiness through separation, akin to the apostle Paul's example, and to be vigilant against the deceptive schemes of the world that seek to corrupt the church's purity and divert from the cross of Christ.

Transcript

Scripture contemplates hostile associations of men and of nations. Isaiah 7, 8, was the era of one, and the prophecy of another. Joel 3 tells of "multitudes, multitudes," gathered together in the day of Jerusalem's final sorrow. Psalm 83 anticipates a confederacy against the Israel of God; and "Gog" is the witness of a host of nations leagued in infidel defiance of the Lord.

But Scripture also contemplates civil or worldly associations -- and it is our business to watch their spirit, their purpose, and their working, awful indeed as they are in forming the character and history of the world, and in urging it on its way to meet the judgment of God.

It was confederacy of this sort which was among the descendants of Noah. The one speech and the one language of the children of men in that day led them to judge that they were strong, and that by a little skill and effort they might wax still stronger, even to independency of God. The material under their hand in the plain of Shinar, promised very fair. They were all of one language, and were journeying in one direction. They were invited by favourable circumstances (providences, as they might say), and they would make a

common effort, and try the industrial resources of nature. Things looked well for progress. With a little skill and diligence of their own, the fruitful plain would yield them brick and mortar, and they might accomplish much. And why should they not use the resources of nature, and exercise their own capabilities? Why should they not try what "the raw material," by man's "art and manufacture," would lead to, and do for them?

This was the language of the children of men in Genesis 11. Whether God would have it thus or not, they never thought of waiting to consider. He was not before them. They did their own pleasure. They built a city and a tower, that both name and security, glory and strength might be theirs.

Thus was it in these early days. in other and very distant days, in the days of the Saviour, it was the same -- with this aggravating circumstance -- that confederacies then formed themselves of strange, discordant elements, because of the working of the natural enmity of the heart to God -- let that heart be disciplined or trained as it may be, whether in a Jewish or Gentile school. In that enmity, the Jew and the Gentile are found together; and so are the Pharisee and the Sadducee -- the men of different politics and of different sects. The world combined these diverse materials against an unworldly Jesus. This was the secret of their confederacy. The Pharisee and the Sadducee were men of different thoughts altogether, considered simply in themselves; but the world can be their common object in resistance of Christ. This is seen in Matthew 16:1-5: "Show us a sign from heaven," they come together and say to Him. That is, they challenge the Lord to accredit Himself in some way that the world could appreciate, or that, otherwise, they would reject Him by common consent.

This is to be laid to heart. The world has power to combine very different elements when an unworldly Christ stands out as a common enemy. Herod and Pilate were made friends together. There may be the secular and the ecclesiastical, even the infidel and the superstitious; but let an unworldly Christ appear, and He will be challenged as the object of common enmity. A heavenly stranger sojourning on earth for a time, is resented as a trespasser by both; and however else they may differ, they can confederate and act together against Him. God, such as man's heart or man's religion gives him, man will accept; but the true God, whose image Jesus is, will never do for him.

All this is for the present consideration of our souls. For the world is becoming a common object in these days of ours. All are aiding its advancement, and the development of its capabilities, and the multiplying of its desirable and delectable things -- and such a generation as this may easily become the material of a confederacy, or common association against the unworldly Jesus and the church of God.

Strange coalition of this kind is presented to us by the Lord Himself in Luke 11. It is a solemn word of warning; and I may add, a seasonable word, just in this present day.

The unclean spirit had been the original tenant of this leprous house. In due time he left it, seeking other scenes of action. But after a while he returns, and finds his old house in a new condition. His absence, the absence of an unclean spirit, has left it open to other influences; and, accordingly, on his return he finds it "swept and garnished." This, however, does not disappoint him. He rather deems it to be more suited to his purpose than ever. And it is in this fact -- this solemn, awful fact -- that I judge there is something for our careful and special observation at this time, and for this generation.

This leprous house changed its style or condition, but not its owner, nor its fitness to answer the purposes of its owner. If the unclean spirit had been disappointed in his wanderings, he is not so on his return to his old dwelling. So far otherwise is it, that he goes to gather seven other spirits, more wicked than himself,

and they all make entrance into the house, more thoroughly than ever to accomplish its ruin. And they succeed. The last state of it is worse than the first.

This is a picture, indeed, of strange, unexpected confederacies. An unclean spirit enters a swept house, associating with himself seven other spirits. This is a strange coalition. Things are found together in this house which naturally suited neither the house itself, nor each other. But still, there they are in company, and dwell and work together. An unclean spirit, with seven other spirits, in a swept and garnished house!

Is this Christendom in her last state? Is it to come to this? Is it not, I rather ask, on its way to this already? Are there not symptoms, somewhat too plain to be mistaken, of such strange, unnatural alliances, all around us? Are not elements in themselves repulsive, beginning to try their capability of combining? Is not "alliance" the favourite watchword of the day? Is not the unclean spirit of darker, earlier days making fresh entrance into a reformed, and swept, and ornamented house? Is not, this the Christendom of the present hour? Are not the premonitions of the Divine Prophet realizing before us and around us at this moment?

There are many spirits abroad at present, "gone out into the world." The old "unclean spirit" is abroad in growing vigour, the spirit of idolatry or superstition. The infidel spirit is abroad. The worldly spirit is abroad -- that energy which, with its ten thousand arts, is embellishing and furnishing its native place, using refinement of all sorts, morals, religion, intellectual culture and intellectual delights, science and music, books and pictures, everything that can set off and recommend the world, and linking "the million" with nobles in the enjoyment of it.

Thus is it in the history of this present hour. The affecting truth that Jesus is the rejected Jesus in this world, is practically forgotten in all this. That mystery is scorned by some, denied by others, slighted by others, and but coldly, carelessly, and feebly acted on by us who thoroughly and entirely own it among the deep and precious things of God. For we say, How could God meet anything in this world but rejection? The world had already departed from Him, ere He came into it. It had set up for itself long before, even from the days of Cain and the city of Enoch. But how deep-seated its enmity must be, when it refused to know such an one as Jesus! This enmity of the world was as the enmity of the Jews, who could forget all their hatred of the Gentile, settled and rooted as that hatred was in the very heart of the nation, and say, in the desire to rid themselves of Him, "We have no king but Caesar" They refused the waters of Shiloh that flowed softly, and rejoiced in Rezin and Remaliah's son.

But confederacy has not closed its history, or spent all its energy yet. Far otherwise. It must be witnessed in full action at the end, as it was at the beginning. We have seen it in the early days of Babel, and in the matured meridian days of the Lord Jesus, and are still to see it in the declining days of the Apocalypse. And the "old Serpent" will be the life and instigator of confederacies at the end, as he was at the beginning, and hitherto. The book of the Apocalypse witnesses this, specially in the mysteries or symbols of the "Woman" and the "Beast."

The Woman sits on many waters. Multitudes, tongues, nations, and peoples, all receive the cup of fornication at her hand. Kings of the earth, merchants of the earth, every shipmaster and sailor, and such as trade in the sea, are subject to her. The Beast has the whole world wondering after him. In himself he combines the lion and the bear and the leopard, and he has ten horns and seven heads. The False Prophet ministers to him, and the kings, by one consent, give their power to him. All that dwell on the earth worship him. Small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, receive his mark in their forehead.

These are awful tokens of confederated energies of evil. And in them we see the beginning reproduced at the end. For confederacy is the mode or form in which man makes display of his natural pride and apostacy.

And in that form of confederation God will judge the revolted children of men speedily, as He has already done in early days. At the beginning, it was the alliance between the Woman and the Serpent that He broke, saying to the Serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman." It was those who were gathered in the rebel plain of Shinar that He scattered over the face of the whole earth. And so it is the body of the Apocalyptic Woman in her pride, He will give to the burning flame; and His supper, "the supper of the Great God," shall celebrate the doom and ruin of the Beast and his associates.

Our present victory, beloved, is by separation. Separation is holiness -- if it be separation to the place and character which the calling of God suggests.

The purpose of the serpent in the garden was to withdraw Eve from the condition in which the Lord God had put her. She was to sacrifice that, and get advancement from him. She consented; and at once as a "chaste virgin" she was ruined. Her purity was lost. Whatever she gained, she lost that. She lost what God had made her.

The church, like the Eve of Genesis 2, should be what the hand of God has made her, taking, as it has done in this age, the cross of Christ as its instrument or material. And that cross has brought her nigh to God, but estranged her from the world, and when the principles of the world propose to cultivate and advance the church, and such proposal is listened to, we see again, what, of old we saw in Genesis 3, the mystic Eve has lost her virgin purity.

The proposal to advance the church by such means is attractive. But so was the proposal of the Serpent at the beginning, "Ye shall be as gods." This was an angel of light, a minister of righteousness, in the judgment of flesh and blood. But it worked corruption and utter moral ruin, for it beguiled her from the state in which God had left her.

And this generation is doing its best to commend the world to the church, the tree to the woman again. it speaks as though the world were now a very different thing from what the cross of Christ has declared it and proved it to be. It speaks as if Christ were no longer a rejected Christ. But if the saint listen, as of old Eve did, he is so far corrupted -- for he is surrendering the place, the condition, and the character, which the cross of Christ has given him and made him.

The serpent would fain give man a garden again. And a happier garden it shall be than God once gave them. He shall have every tree in it. The world shall be a wise world, a religious world, a cultivated world, a delightful place, and still advancing. The man of benevolence, the man of morals, the religious and the intellectual man, the man of refined pleasures, all will find their home in it. And this shall be the world's oneness. And all who desire their fellow-creatures' happiness, and the common rest after so many centuries of confusion and trouble, will surely not refuse to join this honourable and happy confederacy.

Nothing will withstand all this but "the love of the truth" - nothing but faith in that word which gathers a sinner to Jesus and His blood, and the hopes of a poor world-wearied believer to Jesus and His kingdom. Come what may to you, beloved, though it be moral and refined, or religious in its bearing, it is unrighteousness, if it be not of "the truth." (2 Thess. 2).

The world is "to wonder after the beast" before "every tongue confesses Jesus to be Lord." Each will be in its day - but the Beast will have his day, his day of the rule of evil, ere Jesus has His day of the dominion of light and righteousness. The saint has to walk apart from those schemes or confederations which are undertaking to make the world what God can accept, till the rejection of Christ be answered from heaven. Little do many who favour the system of religious ordinances, and assert the rights and dignities of office, think that they are combining with those who are cultivating the masses and the people by liberal institutions. But it is so -- for all are cultivating man instead of renewing him. All are doing something against the truth, and not for the truth. (See 2 Cor. 13:8.) The attempt is very specious. The system of the Beast and his kings will, in its day, be very fair. They have all "one mind" -- and from the attractiveness of such unity nothing will preserve the soul but the faith that knows the principles of God, and that anything or everything that proposes to set the world in order till judgments have cleared it, is of the god of this world and not of heaven. The thing that is to have this "one mind," is the very thing that withstands the Lamb, and is judged of God In the day of the Lord. (Rev. 17: 14; Rev. 19: 19, 20.)

Easy to write this, beloved -- but I know that it is the power of separation that is to be cherished by us. It was so In the soul of the dear apostle, as we have seen him in 2 Timothy. In that affecting epistle, he breathes a spirit. which was strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ, and consciously treading the borders of the glory. And with this he had ardent love for the prosperity of the church, and of his beloved Timothy. Here was the hidden virtue of his beautiful and distinct separation from the world, or the corrupted "great house," which was then rising up before him and around him. His separation was in the power of this faith and hope and charity. And to like grace the Spirit calls us in this day, when the "great house" of that epistle has become the Christendom of this day.

The scenery of the prophets (and that scenery is as real as what at this moment is under our eyes), and I may say, very specially that of the Apocalypse, is acquiring increased distinctness in the thoughts of many of the saints of God in these days. In other days it was looked on as dim and clouded. And is not this, I ask, some symptom that we are approaching those regions -- that we are conscious of increasing distinctness because of nearness?

And besides: there is something of an instinctive turning to thoughts of judgment and of glory among us. There is something of a sense of this solemn fact, that God is about to interfere in some way or another with the course of things around us. The energies of evil are seen to be very active, and the world to be very haughty and self-sufficient. The present day is the manhood of the world. The world is playing the man now. It speaks of other days as one would remember his childhood. It is boasting itself beyond all former pretensions, and promising to do greater things still. And so will it proceed, till in the moment of its loftiest pride the judgment of God overtakes it.

The people of God should wait with the girdle and the lamp, which are the beautiful standing symbols of their calling till the Lord appears -- that is, with minds girt up unto holy separation from present things, and with hearts brightened up with the desire and expectation of coming things.

These thoughts of judgments may profitably move our hearts at this hour. But let me add, for it is a comfort to remember it, that the judgments of God are always only by the way, and never close the scene, or terminate His action and purpose. He does indeed pass through them, but He only passes through them, or rather with them, onward to glory and the kingdom, which is His calling. The Deluge, one of His judgments, led to the new world under the government of Noah. The judgment of the cities of the plain was survived, and Abraham is seen on high, the next morning, above it all, and Lot is delivered. The

judgment of Egypt was the redemption of Israel destined for the inheritance.

And for still further strength and comfort I may add, that if the mind could be delivered from the blinding and prejudicing power of self-love, it would speak the judgment of righteousness, and justify God in His judgments. Look at Adam. His hiding behind the trees of the garden gave judgment against himself with God. Look at the camp in Numbers 14. Their utter silence the moment the Glory appeared did the same. It was like Adam's hiding of himself. Look at David. Nathan catches his conscience when he appealed simply to his moral sense, his estimate of right and wrong, his measure of iniquity and its retribution. He got from David such a sentence as justified the judgment of God against himself. He little suspected that he was pronouncing sentence in his own cause. But it was so -- and self-love being dismissed or set aside for a moment, and the moral sense being left alone in company with the offence, David out of his own mouth is judged, and God's judgment is justified.

So the husbandmen of Matthew 21. Like Nathan with David, the Lord catches the conscience of the Jews. and makes them pronounce their own condemnation. And all this, because self-love was again, as it were, sent out of court, and the mere moral sense, the sense of good and evil, right and wrong, is alone on the judgment-seat. The decree of God against them is there anticipated by themselves.

And so with the man without the wedding-garment In Matthew 22. He got into the marriage-feast with a careless heart, just thinking of himself in the power of some form or other of mere nature. But again, in his case, when the sense that judged what was fitting and necessary was called into exercise, and there was nothing to interfere with its action in the conscience -- when the simple, unmixed thought is presented to him, whether any person in such a dress should be in such a place, he is "speechless," he is convicted, he has nothing to say, and his own judgment tells him that such an one as he has no business In such a place as that.

These may be used by the soul as illustrations of the great truth, that the Judge of all the earth will do right, that He will be justified when He speaks and clear when He judges. Out of our own mouth will He condemn. When Eve pleaded the serpent's guile, and Adam pleaded Eve's gift to him, the Lord God did not condescend to answer the pleas. And who of us at this hour does not justify Him in pronouncing that sentence without replying to those excuses?

All this is for us and our comfort, when we think of Him with whom we have to do; and we may sing of Him and of His praise when the subject is either "mercy" or "judgment." (Ps. 101) But judgment, again I say, never closes the scene. It is never "the end of the Lord." The things of Job were all set right, and much more than that, ere "the end of the Lord" in his history was reached. His things in the world, in his own person, both mind and body, in the family, and in the church, were all in confusion. His cattle were stolen, his houses were in ruins, his children were dead, and his brethren were set against him, he misunderstanding and reviling them, and they injuriously reproaching and condemning him. All was thus out of order; within and around him, as to the world, the family and the church.

How could there be more confusion! But God's "end" lay beyond all this -- for we never reach God's end in either discipline or judgment, the discipline of an individual saint,, or the judgment of a people or a world.

So does the Holy Jesus alone close and crown the book which details the coming judgments of God. (Rev. 22.)

How little does the soul rise up in the power of these things, which are so easily discerned, and so freely spoken of and written about.

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