

359 “Assembling Ourselves Together”

In view of all that is going on around us we have considered in our recent Weekly Reflections the Lord's present and promised dealings with His covenant people the Jews. Then last week we identified the presence of various “images of gold” (based on Daniel Chapter 3) now brazenly set up in British society, before which the people are expected to bow down, using as two all-too-topical examples the promotion of homosexuality and abortion. In consequence, as Bible-believing Christians we are to pray for “the peace of Jerusalem” (Psalm 122.6), with understanding of what that prayer actually means in all its fullness; and we are to stand up for God's Word and ways in the face of the fashionable but false “images of gold”, in whatever form these images may take.

This standing-up has never been easy, as we see so clearly in the Gospels over the Lord Jesus, in the Acts of the Apostles over Paul and his companions, and in subsequent Christian history through to today. “Stander-uppers” for God's truth, in opposition to the various “images of gold” of their times, will be no strangers to confrontation, threats, plots, violence, injustice or even martyrdom. That is still the case today in many parts of the world, which Christians in the so-called “Christian West” can seem rather slow to recognise.

Truly there is a war on, the old “long war against God” as the late Henry Morris entitled one of his excellent books. We need to acknowledge the reality of this war, and, as those redeemed by God-granted faith in the shed blood of Christ, to acknowledge also our unavoidable role within this war.

Thankfully the Scriptures are filled with instructions for the Lord's foot-soldiers. We mentioned last time the crucial battlefield gift of “the whole armour of God” of Ephesians 6, a passage which is well worth our memorising, understanding and adopting. When we are equipped with that armour, of truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, God's Word, and fervent prayer, we have spiritual protection, courage and assurance whenever we are the targets of “the wiles of the devil” and “the fiery darts of the wicked” (from 6.11 and 16).

Another great gift that we foot-soldiers have been given simply consists of each other – the source of Christian fellowship, companionship, guidance and support. We are not alone on this battlefield for we have, in addition to the Lord Himself, one another.

There is a key passage in Hebrews 10 about this, this epistle being written to Jewish believers in Christ who were getting odd ideas as to what Christian discipleship was all about. In view of the glorious “new and living way” through the veil which Christ as our high priest has consecrated for us by His own blood (from vv 19-21), we are then given in the KJV three “Let us” biddings: “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith ... let us hold fast the profession of [our] faith without wavering; and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works” (from vv 22-24).

This “provoking” of one another is then followed with – “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some [is]; but exhorting [one another] ...” (v 25). How easy it is today, for all sorts of reasons, to drift into the old, risky habit of “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” – busy lives, tiredness, shopping trips, family commitments, dissatisfaction with our current Christian fellowship, or whatever.

To express this point in a simple way, there is that picture (perhaps very frowned on now for its fossil-fuel connotations!) of a roaring coal fire from which a piece of red-hot coal is removed and left by itself on the hearth; soon it is black, cold and useless, for it has been separated from its companions. Just so is the risk for the Christian who assumes that the Christian life is a solitary life. How often we will have heard the claim, “You don’t have to go to church to be a Christian!”. Very strictly speaking that is quite true, for a personal faith in “Jesus as Lord” is what makes somebody a Christian (eg., John 3.16 / Romans 10.9), but such a “go-it-alone” attitude means that both the individual and the local Christian fellowship fall short over how the Lord intends things to be.

When faced with the challenge of that image of gold in Daniel 3, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were strengthened in their faith and resolve by being “in it together” – with each other, and with the Lord too, who then wonderfully and visibly appeared alongside them (3.21-30).

Images of gold, wiles of the devil, and fiery darts of the wicked - all these continue today. Thanks be to God, in facing them we are not alone, for we face them with the Lord, and with His armour, and with one another.