

SPIRITUAL WARFARE and GOD'S PERFECT JUSTICE

Ps 89:14

“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face.”

Rev 15:3

“Great and marvellous are Your works, lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!”

Deut 32:4

“He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He.”

THE NATURE OF JUSTICE

The essence of justice is the impartial awarding of what is rightly due to a person with integrity and exactness.

Where God is concerned, justice is dispensed in such a manner that His perfect righteousness is not compromised to the least degree. The bible says that the foundation on which God's authority is administered is JUSTICE and RIGHTEOUSNESS. He will never compromise His justice and righteousness, even in His dealings with Satan.

THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE

It is important to understand that spiritual warfare is not a direct confrontation of people. Paul made this clear when he said, **“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness (demon spirits) in the heavenly places.”** [Eph 6:12]

Our warfare is against the spiritual hosts of wickedness, or demon spirits of Satan. They may directly cause suffering by invoking symptoms like, mental anguish - anger - temper - fear - jealousy - hatred - mocking - lust - depression - resentment - rebellion - terror - pain - sicknesses - nervous disorders - depletion - to name just a few.

They may involve other people who are not under the control of the Lord. They may stir up emotional reactions, or incite feelings like hatred, murder and death, or even direct their speaking as in the case of those yelling out for Christ's death. But the real enemy is Satan and the demon spirits under his control.

Jesus warned us that that, **“A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.”** [John 15:20)] **“They”** in this reading are

the people Jesus encountered who rejected the truth He was presenting, therefore rejecting He Himself.

His advice extends beyond the time of His disciples to all ages. Those who decide in their hearts to reject the truth, open themselves up to be used by Satan's demon spirits in spiritual warfare. They become his instruments in persecuting the saints. Jesus warned us that this is inevitable - that we should expect to be involved in warfare and persecution.

GOD ALLOWS SATAN TO PERSECUTE THE SAINTS

God is Almighty. He is invincible. No one can withstand His purposes. Therefore we may rightly conclude that God allows the saints to undergo a measure of warfare and persecution - without compromising justice. There are a number of reasons why this is allowed to happen, but the bottom line is this - that **“all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”** [Rom 8:28]

Here are some of the reasons why God permits the persecution of the saints.

To Allow Satan to Test Us

God allows us to suffer trials to test and prove us. Peter warned the young church, **“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you...”**[1 Pet 4:12]

The Greek word *‘peirasmos,’* ‘to try,’ has the thought of proving one's fidelity of character. This is not to show God what we are at, because His knowledge of us is perfect and complete at every stage of our existence.

God's perfect justice and righteousness allows for Satan to tempt or test us, to ascertain what in us is still under his control, and therefore can be used legitimately for his purposes.

We first see an indication of this in the Old Testament in Satan's response to God's declaration of Job's righteousness. Satan countered by saying, **“But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!”** God's justice demanded that Satan be given the right to test Job. But we see from God's reply, that all of Satan's harassment is subject to God's careful measurement. **“So the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.””** [Job 1:11-12]

Satan's demand to test the saints is repeated in the New Testament, where we see Jesus make this surprising statement to Peter, **“And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.”** [Lk 22:31] Again God's justice and righteousness are displayed, in that Jesus did not deny Satan's claim to test Peter. Instead He prayed for his strengthening. **“But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.”** [Lk 22:32]

That We Might Learn Warfare

“Now these are the nations which the LORD left, that He might test Israel by them, that is, all who had not known any of the wars in Canaan (this was only so that the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war, at least those who had not formerly known it)...” [Judg 3:1-2]

God did not drive all of the inhabitants out of the land of Canaan because He wanted the young men to learn warfare. Similarly, young Christians are not immediately delivered from all spirits of the flesh. Some are left so that the growing Christian might be trained in spiritual warfare.

On other occasions our work or enterprises seem to suffer from continual obstacles, and onlookers may question whether or not we are in the will of God. But often the truth is that God lowers His hedge of protection so that we might learn to overcome in warfare. One cannot be an overcomer if he hasn't got anything to overcome.

To Give God Just Cause to Punish Those who Persecute the Saints

God's perfect justice is shown in His permitting the persecution of the saints, that He might have just cause to mete out punishment to their persecutors.

“We are bound to thank God always for you brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.” [2 Thess 1:3-10]

God permits the persecution of His saints because the words and acts of their persecutors give Him the grounds to judge them - **“...since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you...”**

That We Might Be Refined

Paul talks of this process working in his own life in 2 Corinthians 4:8-11. **“We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death (of our souliness) for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”** The process of refinement involves our carnal natures being purged out by suffering, and replaced by the

life and nature of Jesus. It is the life of Jesus working in us and through us that bears lasting fruit.

To Test the Origin of Our Works

“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire (of testing trials); and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” [1 Cor 3:11-15]

Again, we should understand that testing our works to ascertain their origin is not for God's understanding. He, with His perfect knowledge, knows exactly what is of Him, and what originates from our flesh. What issues from these trials is for our own benefit that we might repent of self-works and undergo refinement. It is also for a witness to all creation. God says, through Isaiah, **“I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to graven images.”** [Isa 42:8] He will not allow His glory to be given to man, nor His praise to the idolatrous works of the flesh.

To Glorify His Kingdom

God's name and kingdom are glorified when saints endure testing trials without resentment and rebellion. Their strengthened faith and obvious refinement are to God's glory.

“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ...” [1 Pet 1:6-7]

That We May be Strengthened in Faith and Love

And from the saint's point of view, it appears that **“...your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other,”** *because* of **“...all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure...”** [2Thes 1:3-4]

That We Might Repent and Turn From Sin

Our state is made known to us, so that we might repent and turn away from sin. **“For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?...For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.”** [Heb 12:6-7, 10]

THE RIGHT TO ‘RESIST’

Even though God allows, or even initiates warfare circumstances for our refinement and spiritual growth, we should not passively submit to warfare because it is doing us good. God’s justice grants us the right to resist the assaults of Satan. In fact it is He who supplies us with spiritual overcoming weapons.

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds...” [2 Cor 10:4] Our principal weapons are **“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,”** the blood of Jesus Christ, the authority of the name of Jesus Christ, and the authority to bind and loosen.

God has also supplied us with spiritual armour by which we may protect ourselves. **“Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...”** [Eph 6:14-17]

Some of the principles involved in spiritual warfare can be gleaned from a symbolic interpretation of Psalm 149, particularly verses 5 to 9.

**“Let the saints be joyful in glory;
Let them sing aloud on their beds.
Let the high praises of God be in their mouth,
And *the two-edged sword*** in their hand...”**

[Compare Heb 4:12 ‘...the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword...,’ Ephes 6:17 ‘...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...,’ Rev 1:16 ‘...out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword...,’ and Rev 19:15 ‘...out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations.’]

**To execute vengeance on the nations,
And punishments on the peoples;
To *bind*** their kings with chains,
And their nobles with fetters of iron;**

[Compare Matt 16:19 ‘...I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’- and also in Matt 18:18 ‘...I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’]

**To execute on them the written judgment—
This honour have all His saints.”**

The application of Psalm 149 belongs to all those who have ‘separated themselves to God;’ i.e. **“all His saints.”** When God’s people are under attack they are encouraged to strike back with **“the two-edged sword,”** which is the Word of God.

However in choosing to **“execute vengeance on the nations,”** we need to remember Whose vengeance we are executing. The authority is to **“execute on them the written judgment...”** - which indicates that the precise nature and extent of the judgment has already been determined. We are not to add to or diminish God’s judgment in any way.

WE SHOULD NOT GET PERSONAL

In any battle, emotions become heated and an element of personal vengeance can then effect our actions. We can lose sight of the fact that **“we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against...spiritual hosts of wickedness.”** Focusing on the people, and harbouring reactions of resentment, anger, and judgment, cannot be ignored by a just God. For instance, those who persist in resentment will receive a spirit of resentment, with its accompanying power of death. Paul tells us to leave punishment to God.

“Repay no one evil for evil... Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath (allow God to exact punishment); for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” [Rom 12:17-21] “Do not say, “I will recompense evil;” wait for the LORD, and He will save you.” [Prov 20:22]

But lawlessness on our part alters the exact balance of God’s scales of justice. Under God’s system, it is not the victim who sets the extent of the punishment, but the perpetrator. This principle of God’s perfect justice is illustrated in Joel 3:4-8.

**“Indeed, what have you to do with Me,
Tyre and Sidon, and all the coasts of Philistia?
Will you retaliate against Me [or ‘pay Me back’] ?
But if you retaliate against Me [or ‘pay Me back’],
Swiftly and speedily I will return your [deed of] retaliation
upon your own head;
Because you have taken My silver and My gold,
And have carried into your temples My prized possessions.
Also the people of Judah and the people of Jerusalem
You have sold to the Greeks,
That you may remove them far from their borders.
Behold, I will raise them
Out of the place to which you have sold them,
And will return your retaliation upon your own head.
I will sell your sons and your daughters
Into the hand of the people of Judah,
And they will sell them to the Sabeans,
To a people far off;
For the LORD has spoken.”**

Notice the exact measurement of God’s response. “Just as you have done, so will I do to you.” The coastal cities had raided Judah and taken the people away to be sold as slaves in foreign lands. So God’s judgment was for the raiders themselves to be taken captive by the Jews, and sold on to become slaves in a distant land.

Recall the nature of justice: ‘the impartial awarding of what is rightly due to a person with integrity and exactness.’

Where God is concerned, the impartial awarding of what is due, is in accordance with facts - so much and no more, accurately, precisely, exactly. In a legal sense, God’s justice

is utterly impartial. He is not ‘involved’ in a ‘personal’ way. Instead He says “..**swiftly and speedily I will return your deed upon your own head.**” (Amp Bib). “**(His) eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, to give everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings.**” [Jer 32:19]

Spiritual warfare is not about personal vindication. The issue from our perspective may seem so. But the spiritual reality is that God is responding to an affront to His righteousness.

One of the simplest ways to maintain this distinction, is to specifically redirect all darkness that is aggressing on us (such as cursing or evil spirits), back onto the heads of those who sent it. We may do this on the grounds that the blood of Jesus has made us righteous, and consequently any attack is illegal. This exact form of retaliation honours God’s perfect justice, and it prevents us from investing any personal element of retribution into our response.

Warfare Involves Suffering

In any battle, people get hurt. While the wounds in a spiritual war may not involve spurting blood and shattered bones, they will still cause pain and suffering. Knowing the dangers before you enter into the fray, and *accepting* the possibility of resultant trauma before it occurs, are not commonly taught principles in spiritual warfare, but they should be. “**Plans are established by counsel; by wise counsel wage war.**” [Prov 20:18] This is not the area where the young or inexperienced should act independently. They should seek the counsel of one experienced in spiritual warfare.

If God has determined that He will use the circumstances of spiritual warfare to both enter into judgment with those who persecute the saints, and refine the saints by purging their fleshly reactions, then some trauma is unavoidable. But it is possible to minimise our suffering. By constantly turning to the cross and trusting in the eternal blood to continually cleanse us from all sin, we can maintain a state of perpetual righteousness, thereby removing every legal claim of Satan against us. We can adopt an attitude of relinquishment, trusting God to uphold us in well-being, and to punish those who persecute us. We can ‘put off’ the ‘old man’ and clothe ourselves with the presence of the Lord, by that means replacing our hard hearts with His love and compassion, and our weakness with His overcoming strength.

Our ability to withstand and overcome the attacks of the enemy in warfare, does not stem from our own mental or physical ‘toughness.’ Instead it comes from a ‘constant closeness’ to Christ, which the Bible calls ‘abiding in Him.’ In battle we are made to let go of our crumbling outer defences, in order to lay hold of the hidden strength of the ‘life of Christ’ within - we are forced to see our own inadequacy in order to forge our reliance on Him.

GOD WILL BE GLORIFIED IN HIS JUST AND RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENTS

To this point God’s judgmental hand has been largely stilled. The tares have been growing with the wheat, and spiritual darkness has engulfed the church. All worldly institutions have been corrupted by Satan. Isaiah’s prophecy, “**darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people,**” has been fulfilled. [Isa 60:2] But at the end of the

age the Lord **“is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world, and the peoples with equity.”** [Ps 98:9]

It is in His judgments that God’s glory will be seen, and His name exalted - not so much by His awesome power, but by the manifestation of His perfect justice and righteousness. **“But the LORD of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God who is holy shall be hallowed in righteousness.”** [Isa 5:16]

The whole world will be awestruck as they are confronted by Almighty God’s just judgments. **“They (the overcomers) sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvellous are Your works, lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested.”** [Rev 15:3-4]