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MAY WE DEFEND OUR EARTHLY INTERESTS?

Dear Brother Russell: –

At our Dawn Circle the postal ruling was referred to. One sister expressed surprise that you should take the position you have in contending against it: which remark led to a further exchange of thought. A brother said he thought he was supposed to give up anything when asked for it, and let people impose upon him – that that was a part of his sacrifice. Another brother stated he once had a house and lot which was two-thirds paid for, when some obstacle arose, and rather than have any trouble he sent the contractor his deed to the place, letting him have it without standing up for any of his rights. If our little meeting is any criterion, it seems [R2944 : page 30] to me very many of our dear brethren are allowing Satan's followers to defraud them of not a little of their stewardship.

J. H. C _____

We publish this letter, with its answer, believing that some of the Lord's dear sheep have need of counsel along the lines of the inquiry.

It is difficult for many, to rightly adjust the relationship between the two parts of our Lord's command, "Be wise as serpents, harmless as doves." The harmlessness of the sheep and of the dove beautifully represent what should be the character of all the Lord's consecrated people as respects violation of the rights of others; but a sheep is stupid as well as harmless, and the Lord does not recommend that his followers shall consider stupidity a Christian grace. Rather, he encourages us, in the words above quoted, to be wise; – not, like serpents, in venom and disposition to injure and attack, but like serpents in wisdom; that this wisdom in us may be combined with the harmlessness of the dove and of the sheep.

This combination of wisdom and gentleness – a wisdom used for good and not for evil purposes, – is in the Scriptures denominated "the spirit of a sound mind." This sound mind was well illustrated in the conduct of our Lord and of the Apostle Paul, the leading representatives of the truth and examples of the flock in the New Testament. To illustrate: When our Lord was assailed by the scribes and Pharisees, who sought to entrap him in his teachings, he was meek and gentle, as the Lamb of God, but not foolish; – he did not run away from the questions, but, as the narrative shows us, he entrapped in their own arguments those who were seeking to entrap him. When his arrest was threatened in Gethsemane, although he knew that "his hour was come," he did not go forward and say, I know all about this; just take me along. He enquired, Why did you come here to take me as a prisoner, after night? Why were you not courageous enough to take me prisoner in the day time, when the multitudes were surrounding me, as I taught in the Temple? Then he seems to have exercised some influence upon them which caused them to go back and fall to the ground. But having thus asserted the right, and knowing that it was the Father's will that he should now be delivered over to their power, he subsequently permitted them to take him prisoner. In the judgment hall, when reprov'd and smitten unjustly, our Lord defended himself, to the extent of reasoning with his assailant, and declaring his own rectitude.

The Apostle Paul defended himself, frequently, before priests and kings; explaining the justice of his cause; and on one occasion replied to his assailant, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall." In every instance he seems to have used the law, so far as there was a law, for his defence, on one occasion going so far as to appeal his case to a higher court – Caesar's at Rome. Nevertheless, whenever the laws did not support him we find the Apostle bringing no railing accusation against the laws nor against magistrates, but submitting himself, and counselling the Church to "be subject to the powers that be, for the powers that be are ordained [permitted] of God." In all this we understand that the Apostle was entirely right; – within the letter and

spirit of the Master's teaching, when he said, "If any man sue thee at the law, and take away thy cloak, begrudge him not [R2945 : page 30] thy coat also," – if he secure it by process of law. – Luke 6:29.

We consider that the brothers mentioned in the letter erred in judgment; but we are glad to be able to fully approve their heart-intentions. Although, by doing as he did, one failed somewhat in his stewardship of the means entrusted to his care, and to that extent is to be criticized; nevertheless, we are sure that the Lord, who looks at the heart, would be better pleased to see him thus fail in his stewardship than to have seen him violate his conscience in the matter. If the property under consideration was worth contesting for, in our judgment, it would have been his duty to have resisted the injustice practiced, in so far as the laws of his State would grant him justice. The Apostle's words, "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?" (I Cor. 6:1), has no reference to such a case as this. It applies only to differences between brethren in the Church; – amongst the consecrated. A brother is to shield a brother in the Church, and to condone any injustice suffered at his hands, even as he would shield a natural brother and condone his injustice, rather than make the matter public before the world. But we would have no scruple about going into the State courts in an action against a nominal Christian, if he attempted to defraud us, provided the amount involved seemed to justify the trouble and expense incidental to the trial of the case. The reason for this distinction between a brother in the Church and a nominal Christian would be that nominal Christendom accepts present governments and present courts as "Christian" – part and parcel of Christendom itself. Therefore, in trying a case against a nominal Christian in the public courts we would be trying him before a *Christian court*, according to his acceptance of the term.

As respects our appeal to the President against the violation of the law by his representatives in the Post Office Department. We hold that our action was proper, right; and that any other course, – a failure to

take such action, might have been wrong. God opened a wide door of opportunity for the spread of the truth through the postal laws as they now stand; but a man has arisen, and without the authority of the law has deprived us of this open door. We are right in appealing to the law; and to the President, as the head of all the departments of the Government; to protect us in the privileges which the law grants us as it stands. We have the same right to appeal for justice that our Lord exercised and that the Apostle Paul so frequently exercised. We believe that the Lord was pleased with the Apostle's interpretation of his will; and we believe that he is pleased with our interpretation of it in this matter of appealing to the President for rectification of an injustice, – a violation of law, defrauding us of our rights.

But now, suppose that our protests avail nothing; – what will we do? We answer that we will allow the sheep and dove nature to control fully; we **[R2945 : page 31]** will neither become anarchists, nor vicious maligners of the Government; nor make any attacks upon either the laws or those who have defrauded us. We will neither dynamite them literally nor with our mouths and pens; – we will submit. Why? Because we understand this to be a part of the Lord's injunction; that we shall be subject to the powers that be; that we shall be harmless, as sheep and doves. When all the wisdom we possess has been exercised, we shall be content; and take the results as being the will of God; – knowing that he is perfectly able to overrule in the matter as may please him.

Besides, our readers know that for years we have been expecting that the door to opportunities of service would soon close; and we are not surprised if it closes gradually rather than abruptly. We will not be surprised that our protests shall be of no avail in this matter. We will consider, nevertheless, that we have done our duty; and that failure to effect anything should be to us an evidence that the Lord's providence is cooperating in the matter with a view to restraining, to some extent, the opportunities at our disposal.

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