

"THEM THAT ARE CONTENTIOUS"

"God will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honor, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation, and wrath."

THE Apostle's words foregoing are applicable in some degree to everybody, but they are especially addressed to and applicable to the Church. In a general sense, those who are seeking the higher and better things along the lines of loving obedience to whatever they may know of the Divine will, are receiving a blessing day by day, even though their pathway be a narrow and difficult one. On the contrary, those who are of a contentious disposition, fault-finding, irascible, the dissatisfied, are continually making trouble for themselves as well as for others, and are cultivating a disposition which neither God nor anybody in harmony with God, could approve – a disposition which will not be rewarded by eternal life, but bring its possessor into more or less trouble continually, and spell failure for him in the end.

But our subject shines out most distinctly when we apply it as the Apostle here does, to God's consecrated people. Some, a decided minority, we fear, are patiently, perseveringly, seeking for God's best and grandest gift – joint-heirship with the Redeemer in his Kingdom of Glory, and participation in his glorious, divine nature. There is only one way to seek for this great prize successfully, and that is by patiently and perseveringly cultivating and developing in ourselves the *character-likeness* of our Redeemer. (Rom. 8:29.) Various opportunities for serving the Lord are set before us, and these are blessed privileges, but we may rely upon it that the Divine purpose and intention in

permitting such services is for *our own* development in Christian character. The command to all men is, to honor God supremely, and to deal justly with our fellows, treating them as we would be treated by them, loving them as ourselves; but the special command to the New Creation is, to *love one another* as our Elder Brother loved us – self-sacrificingly. Whatever we are permitted to do one for the other is in the nature of a test of our loyalty to God, of our justice toward the world, or of our loving devotion to the brethren.

Following the example of our Lord, we are to lay down our lives in the service of the brethren. This command is not so much for their *need* of our self-sacrifice as for *our need* of it, as a development of our love and as a test of our love. As the Apostle says, "We ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren." **[R4502 : page 323]**

There are plenty of opportunities for sacrificing self in the interest of the Priesthood. Not only are some of the brethren in darkness, in ignorance and superstition, and need our assistance out into the glorious light of Present Truth, but, additionally, some of them have weaknesses and blemishes, and need our consoling sympathy and strengthening encouragements, or loving rebukes. To the extent of our faithfulness in these matters, we are self-sacrificers, pleasing and acceptable to our heavenly Father and our Redeemer.

The Apostle explained to Timothy, an Elder, that he should in meekness reprove those who opposed themselves, and not render evil for evil, nor railing for railing, nor accusation for accusation, but contrariwise by meekness and gentleness, patience and love, should show the brethren the more excellent way, and should develop ourselves in Christlikeness of character. It is by such "patient continuance in well doing," by such patient development of Christlike character, that we may successfully

seek the glory, honor and immortality which God has promised only to such. For, as the Apostle points out, God has predestinated that all who will be of the elect Church, of the Bride class, must be copies of his Son in character, in heart. – Rom. 8:29.

Alas! that there seem to be so few well developed along these lines of Christ's character-likeness. Alas! that so many seem to be cultivating the wrong spirit which they know God will not approve – the contentious spirit, the fault-finding disposition which, instead of building one another up in the most holy faith, is destructive of faith, destructive of peace, destructive of every good quality.

Alas! that amongst those who are in the Truth these contentious persons are to be found in considerable numbers, doing a destructive work, an injurious work, instead of a helpful work. Surely they must know that they are injuring and blemishing their characters and making themselves less and less fit for the Kingdom, or for eternal life on any plane. Surely they must know that they are doing a destructive work in the Body of Christ, which is the Church. Surely they must know that they are sowing seeds of discord, and planting roots of bitterness, which are sure to bring forth an evil fruitage, hurtful to many. Surely they must know that God has expressed a special reprobation for those who thus do injury to the Church. – Matt. 18:6; Luke 17:2.

What will be the reward to these? Not glory, honor and immortality, but indignation, wrath, tribulation, and anguish, says the Apostle. He does not say that this means an eternity of wrath, and anguish, nor do we. On the contrary, knowing that the extreme penalty of opposition to God is the "Second Death," we must suppose that the tribulation and anguish will be more or less connected with the present life – either by their participation in the "Great Company," and passing through the great time of trouble and there learning the lessons they neglected to learn

previously, or, soured in disposition, robbed of the peace, and joy, and love, which they might have possessed as spirit-begotten ones, these will die the [R4502 : page 324] "Second Death" as incorrigible, as having received the grace of God and the instructions of his Word in vain. Instead of developing character symbolized by the fruitful vine, they are developing the characteristics of the briar and the thorn, whose end is destruction.

BE TRANSFORMED

It would be of no avail for us to call attention to these matters of Divine Writ, nor for the Apostle to have penned these words of condemnation, if there were not a possibility of change on the part of those who are well-doing and well-seeking, and also on the part of those who are evil-doing and contentious. Such condemnations, on the contrary, are intended to help us to establish our characters in the right direction. Whoever, therefore, realizes while reading this article that he is going in the wrong direction, cultivating a contentious and fault-finding spirit, and a disposition to pull down the faith and obedience, and spirit of love, in the Body of Christ, will do well to immediately resolve by the grace of God to take the opposite course. And whoever is seeking the glory, honor and immortality of the heavenly calling along the right lines of patient perseverance in well doing, should be encouraged, and made watchful, that he might persevere in the right way, and become more and more blessed, and more and more secure, and entrenched, and fixed, in the character which God will approve, and to which he will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joys of thy Lord."

To those who find themselves possessed of a cantankerous disposition, fault-finding, and nagging, destructive instead of constructive, quarrelsome instead of peaceable, we urge reform in great haste. We remind them that we are nearing the end of the

Church's condition of trial; that we are already in the testing time, and that many are falling because of not having developed proper characters. We urge them to take the matter at once to the Lord in prayer, and by his assisting grace to immediately begin to reverse all these wrong currents of their lives. They should hearken diligently to the Apostle's words, and "seek peace and ensue it," and so far as possible henceforth "live peaceably with all men," and "let the peace of God rule in their hearts," and be thankful for blessings already received. In such a condition of heart they will have little disposition to find fault with the Lord or his providences in connection with his people and his work. They will "learn of him" instead of finding fault with everybody and everything which the Lord does not order to their pleasement.

We urge all such to take note of the fact that the murmurers and complainers in typical Israel were not permitted to enter into Canaan's blessings. (1 Cor. 10:10.) We remind them of the Apostle's words to the effect that murmurings against the Divine arrangements are really murmurings against the Lord himself. Let us do with our might what our hands find to do, without murmuring, without complaining, without fault-finding. (Phil. 2:14.) Let us leave to God the management of his work. Let us humbly realize that if he would commit it all to our care we would be unable to manage it and would be obliged to take it back to him and to solicit his supervision of his own work.

If the thought comes to us that we could manage better than the Lord; that we could guide the harvest work better than he has arranged it, let us flee that thought as a snare of the Adversary by which he would entrap us. Instead of fault-finding and endeavoring to change the Divine arrangements let us do our own parts as faithfully as we know how, uncomplainingly, co-operating to the extent that our conscience and talents will permit in the work which the Lord is carrying on and directing. Surely we do not know that if the Lord should give the entire

management of his harvest work into our hands that we could do it better than he; surely, therefore, we should humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt us in due time.

Let us be assured that only those who do thus humble themselves, and realize the wisdom and grace of God, and fall in line therewith, will have any part in the Kingdom work. The heady, the high-minded, the self-conscious, the contentious, the dissatisfied, shall have neither the good of the present nor the honors of the future.

YE SHALL RECEIVE THE SEVERER TRIAL

The Apostle James admonishes the brethren respecting the peculiar dangers which beset those ambitious to be teachers, saying, "My brethren, be not many masters (teachers), knowing that we (teachers) shall receive the greater condemnation (judgment, or trial). For in many things we offend all" – we are all imperfect. – James 3:1.

While all recognize the truth of the Apostle's words, few seem to be in any great degree deterred by them. As a consequence, we find many seeking the office of teacher in the Church, and perceive also the truth of the Apostle's words that as teachers they are subject to severer trials, and that the majority of those who appear to stumble and fall from the truth are of this class. We write thus not to suggest that teachers are unnecessary or contrary to the Divine arrangement, but to suggest that whoever enters upon the work of teaching should do so with a realization of the grave responsibility which he assumes, and the temptations or trials which beset his pathway toward the heavenly city.

St. Paul wrote, "He that seeketh the office of a bishop (of a shepherd, of an overseer) seeketh a good service," and so we should recognize that whoever out of a pure heart seeks to serve

the Lord's cause as an under-shepherd of the sheep, and as a co-laborer with the Redeemer, is engaging in a most noble service. If he approach this service from this standpoint of earnest desire to serve the flock, an earnest desire to be in full accord with the Great Shepherd, he should not be ashamed to rejoice that he has to this extent the Spirit of the Lord. But if he find in himself, in either great or small measure, a spirit of ambition, a spirit of pride, a spirit of boastfulness, the desire to lord it over the brethren of the household of faith, then let him fear. With trembling heart either let him resign the service, or at the throne of grace rid himself, purge himself, of the evil ambitions of his heart, and be filled with the Spirit of the Master. That holy Spirit is the spirit of meekness, gentleness, patience, longsuffering, brotherly kindness, love; to desire simply and only the glory of God and the blessing of his people – the spirit that is ready to sacrifice self at any moment for the peace of the Body of Christ, or the assistance of the flock.

Some wonder why the Apostle should thus write of special dangers to those brethren who would attempt to teach in the Church. We answer that we accept his words as those of inspiration, and that, additionally, observation **[R4503 : page 324]** shows us the truthfulness of them. Moreover, unconsciously the Lord's dear people who make no pretensions themselves in the direction of teaching are often responsible to a considerable degree for the deflection of those whom they recognize as teachers, and whom unconsciously they lead into temptation. The besetments of teachers are, **(1)** pride, and **(2)** arrogance.

(1) Encouraged by the laudatory words of the brethren, the tendency is for them to feel that they are somebodies, and to attribute the success of their efforts to natural ability, talent, etc., rather than to the wonderful power and beauty of the Truth. Ministers in general seem to be liable to besetment along this line, because it is indeed a very honorable position to stand before our

fellows as ambassadors for the King of Glory. The general tendency is to boast of denominational strength and wisdom. But amongst those who are in the light of "Present Truth" the temptation to personal pride is perhaps even greater.

The antidote for this is a distinct remembrance of the fact that the plan is not our own, but all of its lengths and breadths and heights and depths are of God and for all his people, and that we are highly honored in the delivering of it in the most humble manner conceivable. [R4503 : page 325]

A proper allegiance to the Lord should lead us to hide ourselves, that all the glory and honor might go to the great Author of the Plan of Salvation, and to the great Redeemer, whose sacrifice is its very center, and whose love is the very circumference of our message. With these thoughts impressed upon our minds, the greater the service permitted us, the greater should be our humility and our realization of unworthiness to be the mouthpieces of the great Lord of Glory.

(2) Arrogance we mentioned as one of the besetments. Alas! how inappropriate it is that any, because of being honored of the Lord as his mouthpiece for his message, should attempt to take the place of his Lord, and to act arrogantly toward his brethren, or, as the Apostle expresses it, to "Lord it over God's heritage." (1 Pet. 5:3.) The Scriptures set before us the very reverse standard, namely, that those brethren permitted to serve as teachers, so far from being lords of the Church, are merely its *servants*. While they are servants of God, the Divine direction in the matter is to be sought through the Church. In a word, the Church's election of elders, pastors, or teachers is the election of those whom it esteems to be *the Lord's choice* for its service – to serve it in holy things, to minister to it the grace of God, to dispense for it the spiritual food of the Divine Word.

The Church has been responsible in a considerable measure for the stumbling of those whom it has recognized as Elder-brothers and teachers. While they should not think evil, surmise evil, surmise pride, or surmise arrogance, they should be so wakeful to their own duties and responsibilities toward these brethren that they would not *unduly* flatter them, nor *unduly* encourage them, nor *stimulate* them to manufacture new light.

On the contrary, all who are spiritual should be helpful to those elder-brothers; should compliment them on their loyalty to the Lord, and to the old, old story, rather than commend them for fanciful fictions, or encourage them further along such lines. The Gospel of Grace has not changed; it is still the old, old story of Jesus and his love, and of the Father's love; it still includes the thought of our calling and election by faithfulness to the terms laid down in the Scriptures. The brethren should be encouraged along these lines rather than along the lines of manufacturing types by guess-work without any authority of the Word of God.

As for arrogance on the part of leaders, and a supercilious lording it over the Church, we believe that the Church itself has a great responsibility. Beginners should not be hastily pushed forward, as St. Paul points out, and when any Elder-brother advanced in the Truth begins to show signs of headiness, and of disregard for the voice of the Church, and a disinclination to submit to it all the questions pertaining to its affairs, the Church should curb such arrogance promptly and thoroughly by declining the further election of such brother, and by insisting upon the rights of the Church. The insistence should not, however, be in the nature of wrangling or contention, but in a kindly, brotherly, noble manner the rights of the Church should be set forth, and the vote of the Church on the subject should be asked. If the vote be contrary to the brother who sought to protect

the Church's rights, he should submit gracefully, because by him also the voice of the Church is to be accepted as decisive.

We have great sympathy for the dear brethren who, in the providence of God, occupy the positions of Elders and teachers in the congregations of the Lord's people. And hence, while calling attention to the severe temptations to which they are exposed, and while urging the Church to do its duty and to assist them to keep humble and faithful, we also urge, in the language of the Apostle, that those who are noble, humble, self-sacrificing, cannot be too highly esteemed nor too loyally supported. The Apostle's words are, "Remember them which have the rule (supervision) over you; who have spoken unto you the Word of God; whose faith follow, considering them that have the rule (supervision) over you, and the end of their conversation: Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever." And again, "Obey submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief." (Heb. 13:7,17.) And again, "Esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." – 1 Thess. 5:13.

If the position of an Elder and teacher in the Church of Christ is a very hazardous one, a very difficult one to fill with acceptableness to God and to the brethren, and a position very full of temptation, the Church should sympathetically be very watchful not to increase the temptation, not to foster it and a wrong fruitage. On the contrary, however, where a faithful servant is found, all the loyal brethren should seek in every way to be helpful and to co-operate with such. Instead of being fault-finding and inclined to criticize this, and that, and the other word, and manner, and tone, and look, they should be so full of love and sympathy, and so appreciative of his loving zeal, devotion and humility, as to let trivial and unimportant matters pass unmentioned, and indeed unnoticed. Realizing the responsibility

of his office they have some reason to doubt if they would be able to fill his place with as good or as great ability and humility.

In the selection of Elders the consecrated should remember that the responsibility rests upon them; and no vote should be cast without studious consideration of the Divine will, and prayer for Divine guidance. In seeking to determine the Lord's will in such a matter, we should remember the characteristics of the teacher as set forth in the Scriptures: **(1)** Of course, a teacher should be apt to teach; he should have the natural faculty or ability to make plain matters which he understands. **(2)** Still more important is it that if he have the ability to teach, he shall be clear in the Truth, so the Truth and not error may be set forth with clearness. **(3)** Humility and piety should be considered paramount and primary qualifications for eldership. However able a teacher, however doctrinally clear, no one is properly fitted for this position except he have humility and piety, and unless his words and deeds have manifested his love for the brethren. For, as the Scriptures set forth, these are qualities of great value in God's sight. Now as ever it is true that great opportunities for doing good means even greater opportunities for doing harm. This is because, under present conditions, spiritual sickness and contagions like earthly ailments spread and "catch" much more readily than spiritual health.

=====