

OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO ONE ANOTHER

"We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." – Romans 15:1.

THE GREAT PRINCIPLE set forth in our text is the principle of Love, the essence of the Divine Spirit. God is love; and the Spirit of love is the Spirit of God. This spirit, operating amongst God's people, necessarily makes them considerate of one another. It is the opposite of a selfish spirit. It seeks the welfare of others as well as of itself, especially the welfare of the household of faith.

In every case it should be our disposition, as far as possible, to help the weak and those who need assistance. The general disposition of the world, on the contrary, is to speak slightingly of those who are weak and to say, "They have my sympathy." But *really*, the weak do not get much sympathy. The world applauds those who are the most successful, the mighty, the rich. But as God has sympathy for the weak and lowly, so we should show sympathy more for those who are in need of sympathy than for those who are not. In the Church there are some who are *intellectually* strong, some who are *intellectually weak*, some who are *physically strong*, others who are *physically* weak; some who are *spiritually* strong and others who are *spiritually* weak.

In proportion as we are strong, we should not only help others to overcome their weaknesses, but should be assistful to all, encouraging them and pointing out to them how they can best overcome their shortcomings. We should not make these points too strong, however; for most people do not appreciate their own weaknesses; and the stronger should bear with them in their difficulty as well as bear some of their blunders. If anyone sees his own weakness, it becomes a wonderful incentive to endeavor. Therefore, the mission of the stronger would be so to call the attention of others to their weaknesses as not to offend or stumble them. If their attention be called to these weaknesses

in a wrong way they are liable to be stumbled; but if called in a wise way, they will be helped. This might be applied in all the ramifications of life. We should ever be on the alert to see and to overcome our own weaknesses, and to be glad to spend and be spent in the interest of the brethren, considering matters from their standpoint and lending them our assistance.

The Elders in the Church should be really elder brethren. In the family the elder brother is supposed to be next to the father, helping and assisting, and spending himself for the interests of the other members. And so in the Church. Those who are older in the Truth, who are more developed in the Truth, should encourage, assist, lift up and defend the younger. This we observe in the affairs of earthly life in every family. The elders are helpful in the family to give assistance to the younger, and at the loss of their own convenience, their own preferences; their own pleasures are to be yielded up in the interests of the younger of the family. The thought of the Apostle is that both strong and weak should be growing in grace, in knowledge and in love by exercising themselves in spiritual things.

"WE ARE NOT TO PLEASE OURSELVES"

The latter part of the text, "And not to please ourselves," carries with it the thought that, although we have made a consecration to the Lord, although we have turned our backs upon sin, nevertheless we have a tendency, a disposition to sin. The disposition of the New Creature, however, is not to sin, but to do that which is right and to build himself up in the "most holy faith." Yet in seeking to build himself up in that "most holy faith" he might allow something of self-interest to stand first in his mind. But while he should have self-interest prominent in his mind – his own upbuilding – he should remember that, having responsibility in being a member of Christ, he should not wish merely to please himself, but should be willing to forego some of the right and proper things that he might serve others, and thus get a lesson in the Lord's providence. For instance, the more spiritually

developed [R4928 : page 439] might choose to be off by themselves discussing the interests of the work. But the spirit of the Apostle's exhortation seems to be that they should look beyond their own preferences, seeking to arrange their own affairs so as to be most helpful to the brethren.

Amongst the different classes of the Lord's people, the classes of Bible students, there is a disposition among those who are more advanced to segregate themselves, to hold themselves aloof from the others. We have endeavored to throw our influence against this disposition. If there are some who have less knowledge let them have the opportunity to learn. If they should bring in good, hard questions, so much the better. We are not merely to please ourselves in respect to time and places of meetings. We might see that some would be desirous of having [R4928 : page 440] the meetings in places more difficult of access, but we are not to be selfish or self-seeking, but seek to please the majority of those whose interests are concerned. If this spirit were observed in classes, more progress would be made; and the Lord's people in general are learning this lesson.

The same thought applies to the servants of the Church. There is a disposition for the Elders to say, "We will meet together and discuss amongst ourselves different things." Now, this is not with bad intention. It might be wise to do so occasionally. But as a general thing, the Elders should meet with the Deacons and treat them with confidence, so that they also might be counted in the Lord's service: it is better for all to meet together, and in the majority of things to have the congregation informed about everything, rather than to keep secrets from the Church. Of course, there would be, at times, something not to be made public in a general way; but, as a rule, the Elders and the Deacons should seek to arrange their meetings so as to assist all the congregation who have time and ability, etc., that all will feel that there is no class separation.

Centuries ago the theory was started by the Catholic friends that the clergy are a separate class constituting the Church, and that the others are the children or infants of the Church. This theory was adopted afterwards by the Protestants. And so we see that the clergy set themselves off by themselves as a separate class. The fact that the Lord has set some in the Church as Elders does not make them separate. We are all one class. Thus, the Apostle says that the eye cannot say to the foot, "I have no need of thee." Every member is to be considered; and no one is to assume a position over others. If one has a higher office he is to use it for the others; if one has a lower office he is to use it for the general good. And so, the Church is to make herself ready until all come to the fulness of the Body of the Anointed, of which we are all members.

Principles may never be abandoned for any consideration; but *liberties* and *personal rights* may be ignored in the interest of others frequently and to Divine pleasing. The Apostle Paul was ready to go to any length in defense of principle (Gal. 2:5-11), but in the sacrifice of earthly rights and privileges and liberties for the sake of Christ and the Church, the Apostle evidently came next to our Lord Jesus, and is a noble example to all the Church.

"How wise are God's commands;
How sure His precepts are!"

=====