

## EVIL-DOERS AND BUSYBODIES

"But let none of you suffer as...an evil-doer, or as a busybody in other men's matters." – 1 Peter 4:15.

ASSUREDLY none of the Lord's people could willingly be evil-doers. He who would wilfully do evil would not have the Lord's Spirit, but that of the Adversary. Such being the case, the worst that could be said against any of the truly consecrated surely would be that he had been overtaken in a fault, or that he had some weakness of the flesh, or that by the snare of the Adversary he had been led into doing something which his heart disapproved. But evil deeds, even though unintentional, are to be guarded against carefully. "Let none of you suffer as an evil-doer" – not one – at any time – under any circumstances.

But now we come to the second part of the Apostle's warning – *busybodying*. The saints seem as liable as others to become busybodies and to suffer for so doing. We have sometimes thought that the Lord's consecrated people are more inclined to be busybodies than are others. They have higher standards than others. Their love of righteousness is greater than before, and their hatred of iniquity is greater. There is continually a temptation, therefore, not to be content with minding one's *own business*, but to advise and to seek to regulate everybody and everything.

Of course there is a duty devolving upon every parent to inquire more or less into the affairs of his children, or of those in any manner under his direct care, for whom he is responsible. But even in this he should seek to recognize individual rights and privacies, and not allow his sense of duty and responsibility to impel him to probe into every little matter. A certain reasonable amount of responsibility should be thrown upon children, and they should have a general idea of what is expected of them. They should be required to measure up

to that standard, unless something positively indicates to the contrary. The spirit of busybodying is condemned by the Apostle, and all of God's people should be on guard against it.

Our experience is that busybodying is a fruitful source of difficulty in the Church – in all the ecclesias. A clear knowledge of Present Truth seems rather to increase this difficulty. As in families a wrong feeling often obtains, which impels each member to want to know all about the affairs of every other member, so in the Church there is also a tendency to meddle, to inquire about, to interfere in the matters of others – to *busybody*. In some cases there seems to be a disposition to try to hunt up everything connected with each other, and to sit in judgment upon each other.

The difficulty is a lack of love. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor." It rejoices not to find flaws; it seeks not for them. It surmises no evil – rather it surmises good. Let each of the Lord's people judge himself in this matter and see to what extent he has been a busybody in the affairs of others. Let each decide in his own case that the fault, in proportion as he has it, is a lack of the spirit of love, and let each in that proportion go to the Lord prayerfully, earnestly seeking to be built up in the quality of love.

Well do we know that he who loves not a brother whom he has seen has no assurance that he really loves God whom he has not seen. We may safely conclude that there is some of the gall of bitterness in the heart, if we take pleasure in seeking flaws in the flesh of the members of the Body of Christ. Their flesh, justified by the Redeemer and consecrated, becomes *His* flesh. Whoever, therefore, is a faultfinder and busybody in the affairs of the brethren is doing this against the flesh of *Jesus*. "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." – Acts 9:5; 22:8.

## ENSNARED BY THE ADVERSARY

Our confidence in the brethren is such that we cannot believe that any of them would willingly and intentionally, or of preference, take the loveless course of injury. Our thought is that the Adversary is on the alert to ensnare God's people and to develop in them the spirit of busyboding and lovelessness, under the guise of duty, love of righteousness, justice, etc. They overlook the fact that God neither authorized us to judge one another, nor to exact justice from each other. He neither authorized His people to chastise each other, nor to punish each other in any manner. He has never authorized His people to become inquisitors, investigators, busybodies.

On the contrary, He has told us to "judge nothing before the time," and that *He* will attend to this matter. Is it not written, "The Lord will judge His people"? Are we afraid that He is incompetent? Shall we attempt to be wiser than He? Shall we take into our own hands matters which He said that we should leave in His hands? If we do so, we shall be sure to get ourselves into difficulty, and perhaps get others into difficulty as well.

Whoever busybodies will suffer. It may be that the victim also will suffer and that many will be defiled, but we may be sure that the busybodies themselves will not escape. The punishment of the busybody in part no doubt **[R5274 : page 212]** will be the rupture of his own relationship with God – the loss of his own peace and joy and fellowship with the Holy Spirit. This will be his reward for busyboding.

If a brother and a sister in the Church seem to have difficulty, mind *your own* business, and allow them to settle the matter between themselves. If they are related as parents and children, let them adjust the matter by themselves, and learn whatever lessons the Lord as their Judge and Teacher will give them. If they are husband and wife, the matter is the same. Let them alone. Do not busybody. Even if one of them should come to you and ask advice,

be slow to give it – decline to hear the case – follow the Lord's counsel. Advise the one who complains that the Lord has given instructions, and that it is not your province to interfere – that Matthew 18:15-17 directs the course to be pursued.

See that you have nothing to do with such a case unless it come to you directly in line with this arrangement which the Lord has provided. Otherwise you are busybodying and will make trouble for yourselves and for others. If called into the family mix-up, rather regret the necessity than be eager to nose into their affairs. Advise them first, in the best way you know how, to adjust matters between themselves, reminding them of the words of Jesus, "That which God hath joined together let no man put asunder," and then see that *you* do nothing to put them asunder or to help to complete the separation of spirit which already has started.

Remember that as the Lord's representative you have no authority whatever to be in the least a *disturber*, but are commissioned only to be a *peacemaker*. When you are called in, in such a case, try to be just, fair, reasonable, in full accord with the Golden Rule in every word that you shall utter. Those who may hope to be entrusted with the judgment of the world in the future (I Corinthians 6:2) must qualify now by a development of a high sense of mercy and love, as well as of justice.

### **BUSYBODYING AN EVIDENCE OF PRIDE**

But, says one, is it not a part of our duty to help keep the Church pure? And in order to do so, should we not be on the alert? If, therefore, we see a husband and a wife, or a brother and a sister, or parents and children out of accord, are we not in duty bound to pry into their affairs, in order to see if we cannot set them straight?

That is exactly the busybody's spirit. We are mentioning it because a great many of the Lord's dear people who *mean* the very best do not know what busybodying is while they are doing it.

Mind *your own* affairs! If you get too busy watching *others*, the Adversary will take advantage of *you*. So long as the outward conduct of any brother or sister is reasonable and fair, Justice and Love both say that you should not meddle with them, in the sense of trying to mind *their* business. Content yourself with setting them a good example of meekness, faith, patience, brotherly-kindness, love. Then if they ever need advice, they may voluntarily come to you. And then will be your time to show your moderation and to give them advice as an oracle of God, in harmony with Matthew 18:15-17 – and *nothing more*.

But, says another, does not St. Paul criticize the Church at Corinth because they had in their midst one who had grievously sinned? And did he not upbraid the Church for their failure to judge and rid themselves of such a person? Quite true. But that was a case of open, wilful, acknowledged sin, disgraceful to the individual and to all with whom he associated. And so it should be [R5275 : page 212] today. If any one lives in open sin, and acknowledges it, and boasts of it, the case should be promptly taken note of by the Church along the lines of Matthew 18:15-18. If the erring one still continues in a wrong attitude, in open sin, the final step should be his complete separation from the Church. Until he has made a complete reform, he should be thoroughly disowned by the Church.

Surely such cases are rare among the Lord's people, and equally rare should be the procedure which the Apostle suggests for such a case. The Apostle is not suggesting inquisition into the past lives of all those who constitute the Church of Christ. On the contrary, in one of his Epistles he intimates that he knew full well that many who were of the Church had at one time been quite disreputable characters. He says, "And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of our Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." – I Corinthians 6:11.

It is a wholly mistaken idea that any of us is commissioned to set everybody else right. It betokens a great deal of pride to have such an impression. If some brother and sister do not harmonize very well, let them alone. If they think it best not to be very intimate, let them alone. If they are married, and believe it to be to their best interests to live separate, let them alone – mind your own business. If there is some secret fault, let them alone. "God will judge His people." You have no business to meddle with it, unless He gives you some further commission than we find in the Scriptures.

