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CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER

– *NOVEMBER 9. – ROMANS 14:7-21. –*

"It is good not to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor to do anything whereby thy brother stumbleth." – Romans 14:21

– **Diaglott.**

THIS lesson makes, perhaps, the strongest appeal of anything in the Bible in favor of total abstinence from the use of intoxicating liquors. True, it is addressed only to Christians, as is the entire New Testament. Nevertheless, many who have not become followers of Jesus can appreciate the argument here, and to many such it will appeal – not along the highest Christian lines, but along the lines of the Golden Rule.

To make a distinction between the Golden Rule, the acknowledged standard for all mankind, and a Christian's rule of life will be considered by many, doubtless, as a distinction without a difference. But this is not true. [R5324 : page 298] The Golden Rule, that one should do to others as he would be done by, is a simple rule of justice. All should recognize it. All should follow it, as none will dispute it.

The rule for Christian living, as taught by the Master and exemplified by Him, is far more exacting than the Golden Rule, which is applicable to all men. Those who become followers of Christ are, of course, subject to the Golden Rule, but they voluntarily place themselves under a far more stringent rule. Their Covenant with the Lord is that in the doing of His will – the doing of righteousness – they will ever stand ready to sacrifice everything, even life itself. This is what the Apostle meant when he declared that Christ pleased not Himself. Even though His will was a perfect one, He renounced His rights, privileges, liberties, that He might serve

humanity, and thus lay the foundation for carrying out the Heavenly Father's glorious purposes respecting our race.

The present call of the Church is for those who have the "same mind which was also in Christ Jesus." It is a call for sacrificers. As St. Paul declares, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Romans 12:1.) This sacrificing is not to be done in a foolish or aimless way. We are not to sacrifice the things that are right and proper, simply that we may suffer. Right and proper things we may enjoy, except as God shall open our eyes to see privileges and opportunities for self-denial which would enable us to forward His cause, and to minister grace and truth to those for whom Christ died.

"NONE OF US LIVETH TO HIMSELF"

Let us first consider our lesson from the standpoint of the consecrated people of God, and afterwards from the standpoint of others who love righteousness, but who have not, as yet, joined the Lord and His faithful, self-sacrificing band of followers.

As for the world, they *do* live to themselves and die to themselves. That is to say, their own personal interests stand first with them. Only to Christ and the Church could these words apply; for none others than these have entered into such a Covenant of self-renunciation, giving up the present with all of its privileges and interests in exchange for a promise of a spiritual life hereafter, in the resurrection.

All these, by the terms of their Covenant, are to live unto the Lord – to do His will and not their own will, to serve Him and not to serve self, to lay down their lives in fighting a good fight against sin. All these, when they die, will be dying unto the Lord, in the sense that they are counted as members of the Body of Christ, every member of which must die to the flesh before the entire Body

complete can be glorified beyond the veil. To these, therefore, apply the words, "Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's."

This being true, the Christian is to have no will of his own as respects his living or his dying, or any of his affairs. Everything is to be fully committed and submitted to the great Head of the Church. Christ's death on behalf of all is efficacious, not only for the dead, but also for the living. All who recognize Him, and are fully consecrated to His service, trust Him fully, in life and in death.

The Apostle proceeds to show that we who constitute the Church which is the Body of Christ are not judges one of another, that all judgment is vested in the Head, the Redeemer of all. Each one now accepted as a member of the Church must ultimately stand the inspection of the Head of the Church; for our present membership in His Body is a probationary one. Loyalty, faithfulness to the Head of the Church now, will bring to us eventually membership in His glorious Body, the Church beyond the veil – His joint-heirs in the Kingdom – His Bride.

The Apostle's argument, then, is that we should avoid condemning one another, and content ourselves with encouraging each other in the good way. Since it is written that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess to God, this proves that our final accounting as members of the Church of Christ will be to God, or to our Lord Jesus as His Representative.

LET US, THEN, JUDGE OURSELVES

The Apostle's argument also is that, instead of judging, condemning, fellow-members of the consecrated Body, we should be full of sympathy for them. We should realize that we do not know thoroughly their trials, their difficulties, their environments, their heredities. This should make us very sympathetic towards all the brethren. Our keen sense of justice, our love of righteousness, our hatred of iniquity, should find its principal exercise in self-criticism,

and in watchfulness not to do anything that would stumble a brother – not to do anything that would discourage a brother or cause him to fall away from the faith and the works which the Lord requires.

What a wonderful lesson is this in battling against self, rather than against enemies! How many find it easy to excuse their own weaknesses while they are very captious and critical as respects the shortcomings of others! How the Lord warned His people against such an attitude saying, "With what [soever kind of] judgment ye judge [a brother], ye shall be judged" [yourself of the Lord]. – Matthew 7:2.

If you are hypercritical and wish to measure others up to the full standard of perfection, you are thus recognizing a high standard, and that recognition on your part will make it proper for the Lord to measure you by that high standard. If we could but remember this – that the merciful will obtain mercy – how glad we all would be to be extremely merciful to others, extremely lenient in our judgments and reproofs, hoping that the Lord would be correspondingly lenient with us! – James 2:13.

The Lord is not in this establishing a low standard, and wishing His people to think lightly of their own weaknesses and failures, and those of others. He is, on the contrary, setting up a high standard of love, sympathy, and kindness. Love is the principal thing, in God's sight. Whoever, therefore, has love and sympathy most highly developed, the Lord may well esteem as highly developed along the lines most essential in His sight, most essential for a place in His Mediatorial Kingdom.

NOTHING UNCLEAN OF ITSELF

"I know and am persuaded of the Lord Jesus, that **[R5324 : page 299]** nothing is unclean [unholy] of itself," writes the Apostle. The Apostle is referring not to filthiness of clothing or person, but to foods which were to the Jew made improper, ceremonially unclean.

In other words, while the Jew was forbidden the use of swine, rabbits, oysters, etc., it was not that these foods would make him actually impure or evil in God's sight, but that the restrictions were imposed as tests of his loyalty and obedience to God, just as the forbidden fruit of Eden was thereafter unclean to Adam and Eve.

The Apostle's argument is that to the Jew who died to all hope of attaining eternal life through keeping the Law Covenant, and who became united to Christ, the restrictions of the Law Covenant would no longer be binding. And, of course, to the Gentile, who never was under the Law Covenant, its restrictions would have no application when he accepted Christ.

Having stated this broad ground, the Apostle admits that if any man had his reasoning faculties so twisted on the subject that he thought himself under obligations, he would be responsible according to his mind or judgment on the subject. If, for instance, a Christian thought that he was obliged to avoid eating pork, that thought in his mind would constitute an obligation; for for him to violate his conscience would mean that he had willingly, knowingly, committed sin; for he would be wrong in doing what he thought was wrong, however harmless the matter might be in itself.

But now comes the final argument: Anybody realizing his own liberty, as the Apostle did, might eat freely, according to his convenience, without any reproof from his conscience or in the sight of God. But the brother still in the dark respecting his liberty should have consideration – should not be urged to violate his conscience. Rather, the brother of enlightened mind should yield to the other, and abstain from using his liberty, lest he should tempt his brother to violate his conscience.

This question of eating ceremonially unclean meat, or meat theoretically unclean because it had been first waved before an idol, is a question which no longer is a live issue among Christians; for

general intelligence on the subject has gained the mastery everywhere.

The special application of this lesson to Christians is along a still different line. For instance, suppose that one brother had from childhood been accustomed to drinking beer, ale, etc., and that in his estimation it did him no injury. But suppose a number of brethren, less strong than he, physically and mentally, could not touch intoxicants without harming themselves; and suppose that the example of the drinking brother would continue to be a temptation to the others. What should be his course?

The argument of the Apostle would seem to be that the brother who is strong, mentally, morally and physically, should gladly abstain from anything that would stumble his brother, or anybody else upon whom he exercised an influence. "Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died." (Romans 14:15.) If Christ loved the world so much as to leave His Heavenly riches and glory to die for sinners, should not we, in proportion as we have His Spirit, be glad to lay down our lives for the brethren, as the Apostle elsewhere exhorts us? And **[R5325 : page 299]** if so, should we not be much more ready to abstain from the use of comparatively trifling liberties for the sake of our weaker brother, for whom Christ died? This is a strong argument. Who can deny it?

"Let not then your good be evil spoken of." Your knowledge, your appreciation, of your liberties is a good thing, a desirable thing; nevertheless, you should so govern your exercise of that liberty that none will misunderstand it, and think you an evil-doer. Rather restrain yourself of your liberties, preserve others from the temptation too strong for them, and increase your own influence by faithfully abstaining from everything that might appear to be an evil in the sight of others, however right it might be in your own sight, and however correct your own judgment of the Divine Law on the subject might be.

"NOT MEAT AND DRINK"

The Apostle adds another argument (v.17). He remarks, For the advantages connected with our membership in the embryo Kingdom of God consist not in the greater privileges and liberties we have in eating and drinking, but consist rather in the righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit which are ours because we are probationary members of this Kingdom Class. He who thus serves Christ is well pleasing to God and is approved of men. "Let us, therefore, follow after the things which make for peace and things whereby we may edify one another. Overthrow not for meat's sake the work of God. All things indeed are clean; but evil for that man who eateth with offense. It is good not to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor to do anything whereby thy brother stumbleth."

The application of the Golden Rule on the part of the world would seem to be a settlement of many questions of the present time. Do unto others weaker than yourself, in precept and example, what you would have them do for you in precept and example, if you were the weaker and they the stronger.

