

THE SPIRIT OF HELPFULNESS

"Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification." – Romans 15:2.

THE Apostle Paul does not say in our text, Let the younger ones please their neighbor, nor does he say, Let the older ones please their neighbor; but he says, "Let every one of us please his neighbor." All of the Lord's people should have such an interest in one another and in the Lord's cause, and should have so much of the spirit of the Master, that they would seek rather to sacrifice themselves than to gratify self, especially at the expense of others.

If we have the spirit of the Master, we shall find various ways in which we will sacrifice self without waiting for specific directions. The Law of Love will incite us to act contrary to our own natural preferences, if by so doing we shall help one another in the good way.

In his letter to the Corinthian Church the Apostle illustrates this principle by a practical application re the Greek custom of offering their meat in their temples. After having been thus offered to the idols, the meat was considered to be especially sacred. Thus nearly all of the meat available was offered to idols, so that whenever one wished to have meat he could find none that had not been thus offered.

Those who had come out of idolatry into Christianity, knew that the worship of idols was wrong; for they had learned that there is only the one true God. They also knew that the meat itself had not been hurt by being offered to idols; for an idol is *nothing*. But they should have been willing to deny themselves meat rather than to injure the conscience of a weak brother who still thought that the meat thus offered was sacred, or who thought that it was

contaminated. The Apostle declares that he would abstain altogether from eating meat rather than risk stumbling a brother who could not take the broader, truer view. To stumble such a one, might be to throw him out of the right way entirely.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR INFLUENCE

The Apostle did not say that it is not *right* to eat meat; but that he was willing to *forego* his rights and privileges in order to edify another. These others of whom he spoke had not come to appreciate fully the fact that meat offered to idols had not been hurt thereby. To set meat before a piece of stone would not injure it; and so to set it before an idol would not hurt it. But St. Paul could better afford to give up eating meat altogether than to stumble a brother.

The *principle* is obvious. We should, if necessary, be willing to deny ourselves some of our privileges if this course would be of any assistance to a brother and would avoid stumbling him. Some of the Lord's people have very sensitive consciences, others are less sensitive. The longer one has been in the School of Christ and the more ability he has, the more easily should he discern what would be pleasing to the Lord. As a Christian, he would not want to do anything to offend the Lord, even if he were to go without meat for the remainder of his life.

But if he could take the position that his own conscience would approve of a certain course, then the question would be, Would he allow his intelligence, his poise of mind, to work injury to a brother? Would he wish to stumble a brother, to make him weak, to lead him to violate his conscience? Or would he wish to lose all his influence for good over his brother? The Apostle answers this suggestion in the negative; he says, When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak consciences, ye *sin against Christ*. "Wherefore, if *meat* make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." – 1 Cor. 8:1-13.

RE SUNDAY OBSERVANCE

Applying the above principle – our responsibility for our influence – to Sunday observance, we are not to feel a bondage, as the Jews did on their Sabbath day. But we should avoid driving tacks or making any unnecessary noises. We should avoid singing or playing on an instrument anything that would not generally be recognized as in keeping with things sacred. We should avoid what would be considered by others as not observing the Sabbath. We should do this for the sake of our influence. To our understanding every day is a part of the great Sabbath into which we have entered – *rest in Christ*. We have a greater liberty. But we are not to use this liberty to the injury of others.

Many people think that any kind of labor is a violation of the Fourth Commandment. From our viewpoint we know that the Sabbath of the Jew was typical; and we see what the antitype is. We are enjoying the antitype of that Sabbath. But while we might have liberty to work on Sunday, our so doing might stumble our neighbor. We would not be violating any *principle* in not observing Sunday; but for the sake of not stumbling our neighbor, we are glad to rest from our work and to give ourselves to the study of God's Word.

Christian people generally do not observe Sunday in the way they *think* they *should* observe it. The conception of many is that they should observe it as rigidly as [R5412 : page 70] the Jewish Law set forth; and that neither the ox nor the ass, the automobile, the street cars nor the steam cars should be used. Indeed, they would not think it right to go any great distance on the Sabbath.

As a matter of fact, the nominal church of today are not living up to *their own* conceptions of God's Law. As we get opportunity, we would like to assist these people to get a truer meaning of the Sabbath, that their consciences be not hurt, but be free from *uneasiness*. Sunday should be a day that is quiet and reverential in every way, and devoted specially to the service of God

– a day in which business is restricted, and as far as possible eliminated. But the interests of the Lord's work forbid our always refraining from the use of steam cars, street cars, etc., on Sunday.

Remembering that the word *Sabbath* signifies *rest*, as the Apostle used it (Heb. 4:9, *margin*), we can see that the Church of Christ keeps the Sabbath, or rest, *every day*, and recognizes God's arrangement in connection with this matter. Those who keep every seventh day *as* a Sabbath, but who fail to enter into and keep the *rest of faith*, are not keeping the true Sabbath, but keeping another, so far as the Church is concerned.

The Sabbath arrangement was for the *Jews*. We have the better arrangement under our Covenant. We enter into rest, our Sabbath, every day; and we are hoping soon to enter into the still Greater Sabbath. In that Sabbath, the Millennium, we shall have not only rest of *heart*, but also perfection; and we shall then not be beset by the trials and difficulties of life. During His ministry Jesus chose the Sabbath day in which to perform miracles, heal the sick, that He might show forth the kind of works which He will perform during the Great Sabbath Day, the seventh-thousand-year day – the Millennium.

HELPING, NOT HINDERING, OUR NEIGHBORS

We can apply this principle in a general way. We can apply it to our conversation with Christian people. There is a way of taunting people on their ignorance, etc. This is not love; for love does not delight to expose another's weaknesses. The more careful we become in our words and our actions, the more polite we shall be, the more helpful.

"Politeness is to do and say
The kindest thing in the kindest way."

One may be polite for the sake of policy or for the sake of principle. Our pleasing of our neighbors should be for their edification. We should be glad to do all that we can for their assistance, their edification, their uplift, their upbuilding. If we can speak a pleasant word, a kind word, it would be for upbuilding; and we should speak it, instead of speaking an unkind word.

In our desire for the upbuilding of others we are to have in mind primarily the upbuilding of the Lord's people in spiritual things. As the Apostle says, we are **[R5413 : page 70]** "to provoke one another." We know that there are different ways of provoking others, and St. Paul shows us the right way. What the Apostle had in mind was the reverse of provoking to anger, hatred and strife. Some of the dear brethren who are evidently very sincere have not caught the spirit of the Truth on this subject; and wherever they go, they are apt to stir up the evil mind of others, instead of stirring up their good mind and provoking to love and good works.

We are to please our neighbors so far as it would be for their good, and according to right principles. But to upbuild one in injustice would not be right. We should not think it right to let our neighbor's chickens run all over our garden; and we think that he would thus be more edified by our firm stand for right. But we must not tell him how to manage his chickens. We must do our best to keep his chickens off our place; but we would make a mistake if we were to go in and order our neighbor's chickens, house and children. To do so would be busybodying. We shall have enough to do to look after the weaknesses of our own family.

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