

RIGHTEOUS AND UNRIGHTEOUS ANGER

"Love is not easily provoked." – 1 Corinthians 13:5.

IN THE chapter from which our text is taken, St. Paul sets forth the prime necessity for the cultivation and development of Love, without which, whatever else we may attain, we shall be nothing in the sight of God. The Apostle tells us in the words of our text, that love is not easily provoked. Evidently he uses the word provoke here in a very different sense from its meaning where he says that we should "consider one another, to provoke unto love and good works." (Hebrews 10:24.) The thought in the latter text is to incite to good works, to call forth love in others, to exert an influence favorable to righteousness. The thought in our present text, however, is that of being excited, or roused, to anger. St. Paul declares that love is not easily thus aroused, but is long-suffering.

We might say, strictly speaking, that it is not the quality of Love itself that would ever be moved to anger. Yet righteous anger – a just indignation aroused by our love for the principles of righteousness – is not incompatible with love. "God is Love," and the Scriptures assure us that He "is angry with the wicked every day." His anger is righteous indignation against sin.

GOD'S RIGHTEOUS ANGER

Looking to God as our great Example, we see that His Love was manifested on behalf of His human creatures in the beginning. It was love for humanity that provided the Garden of Eden with all its blessings and its perfect life, just as His love for the angels had provided all their blessings. But when Sin came in, Love stepped back; or in other words, Justice was the special attribute of God then manifested. It was better for mankind that there should be this

punishment for sin; for from the foundation of the world God, foreknowing man's fall, had purchased his redemption. So even in the sentence of death His love for man persisted. But God is the opponent of sin, and when His Law was violated, Love, or He who is the embodiment of Love, was provoked to righteous anger.

God's indignation was likewise kindled against His chosen people, the Jews, when He said to the Prophet (Jeremiah 8:19), "Why have they provoked Me to anger?" Many Scriptures speak of God's anger. That anger has ever burned against sin. It has been resting upon the world for six thousand years. But the Love of God has in no way been violated by this attitude against the condemned world. Therefore, Love can be justly [R5603 : page 6] provoked to anger. He who declares that Justice is the foundation of His Throne never indulges in sentiments which are not in the fullest harmony with that Justice. But He has arranged for the recovery of this condemned race. The Love of God has made this provision for His fallen creatures.

GOD'S LOVE HELD IN ABEYANCE

But Love is not easily provoked, not unjustly provoked. It required an act of *intentional disobedience* on the part of Father Adam to provoke God to anger. It was not because Mother Eve was deceived that the sentence came upon the world. The anger of God came upon mankind and the sentence of death was pronounced because of Father Adam's sin, which was committed with full knowledge. And during all these six thousand years of sin God's Love has been held in abeyance, so to speak, provoked to the point of withdrawal.

But all the while God's character has not changed. He did not cause the diabolical conditions which have existed since the fall of man. Neither Love nor Justice, as embodied in Jehovah, would sanction sin; "The wages of Sin is death." (Romans 6:23.) And everything that goes with death as its natural result is a part of that

penalty. But God has permitted these conditions, knowing that by His Power they would all be overruled for the ultimate good of mankind. The great Adversary of God is responsible for the disaster which Sin has wrought upon the earth. But the Almighty will yet cause the wrath of Satan to work out good for the children of men, ultimately crushing, annihilating, the great Enemy of righteousness. – Hebrews 2:14.

The Love of God, thus held in abeyance, has bided its time, to be revealed to astonished man when the due time shall have come. Nearly two thousand years ago Love manifested itself on behalf of the world, when God sent forth His Only-Begotten Son to be man's Redeemer. He came to earth and gave His life – a willing sacrifice for human sin. Then the call went forth to gather the Church, the class who were in God's Purpose to be the Bride of His Son, to be associated with Him in the great future work for the race of Adam. During this Gospel Age, this Church is being gathered, and in due time will be exalted in Kingdom glory. Then God's love will manifest itself to our race. The Kingdom of God will lift up mankind from sin and degradation and death, into the light and glory of the Lord – all who are willing to accept life on God's terms.

SPECIAL CRISES IN CHRISTIAN LIFE

How earnestly we as children of God should watch and pray that we may indeed be fitted for our great future work – now so near! There is a danger that love will not be sufficiently strong in us; for by reason of the fall, sin and selfishness have come to be preponderating influences in the world. These, operating for six thousand years, have made man very deficient in love, sympathy, brotherly-kindness and long-suffering. Now there is a greater tendency toward anger, malice, hatred, strife, than toward love. Consequently, when God accepts us into His family, He tells us that one of the first requirements is *love*. Love must grow in our

hearts and minds, and permeate all our thoughts, words and actions.

Our fallen flesh, helped on by the unseen "powers of the air," will seek to prevent our attaining this necessary condition; and after we have *attained* it, strong pressure will at times be brought to bear upon us as New Creatures to induce us to withdraw from this position. From time to time the child of God has experiences with others of the brethren that seem to threaten his spiritual health, or even his spiritual life. The powers of darkness assail him, endeavoring to encourage the feelings and sentiments which he is strongly tempted to adopt. He has come to a crisis in his Christian experience. He must go forward or backward. He cannot stand still. The struggle is on. Will this severe trial prove a stepping-stone to lift him nearer God, or will it be a stone of stumbling, to overthrow him?

At such crucial times, the only refuge is prayer. The Lord permits these very trials to test our mettle as children of God. The Adversary will endeavor to place the matter before our agitated minds in the most unfavorable light as regards the brother or sister. He will seek to pervert the judgment, and to deceive the mind as to the real facts in the case; and our flesh responds to this view of the matter. The only safe course is to refuse to entertain in the slightest degree the thoughts of bitterness trying to find a lodgment in our mind and heart, and to cry at once to the Lord for strength and help in our time of need, seeking counsel of His Word bearing upon our proper attitude in such an emergency. Let us remember the words of the hymn we have often sung:

"Yield not to temptation,
For yielding is sin;
Each victory will help you
Some other to win.
Fight manfully onward,

Dark passions subdue;
Look ever to Jesus,
He'll carry you through."

"FORGIVE, AND YE SHALL BE FORGIVEN"

Let us, then, be kind and forbearing one with another, brethren, seeking to put the kindest construction upon the words, the actions and the natural tendencies of one another, remembering our own peculiarities and foibles. Let us remember that each of us is blemished by the fall, and that those of the brethren who try us most may have had hereditary tendencies and environments in earlier life of which we are not aware, and which would make us very pitiful if we knew. Let us remember also that *we* may be altogether unaware of some of our own weaknesses and mannerisms, which may grate upon others. We should be much more careful to note our own mistakes and faults than those of other brethren of the Lord.

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger [fleshly anger], and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" – and still forgives you. (Ephesians 4:31,32.) "Put on, therefore, as the Elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have occasion of complaint against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things, put on *love*, which is the *bond of perfectness*. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which ye are also called in one Body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." – Colossians 3:12-16.

After the child of the Lord has gained the victory in a struggle like this, and has through prayer and determined effort brought the Arm of God to his deliverance, he is a stronger Christian than before the trial came. He has taken a stride forward in the narrow way; he has taken a firmer hold on God, and will be the better enabled to conquer in the next testing. But every failure to thus overcome leaves the child of God weaker and less able to resist the onslaught of his flesh and of the [R5604 : page 7] Adversary and his evil host, and the less sure of being a final overcomer.

In speaking of love as respects the Church of Christ, the Apostle assures us that if we would be pleasing to the Lord we must develop richly this grace. Those who possess this quality in goodly measure will not be easily provoked to anger, will not readily take offense, will not be too watchful lest their rights and their dignity be infringed upon. Those who have little love will be easily angered and offended. Let us keep self down, and diligently continue the work of its crucifixion, looking ever to Him from whom cometh our help. The love which our Lord appreciates is longsuffering. This does not mean that there would never be occasions for just indignation, righteous anger. There should be a feeling of righteous anger when we see great injustice. Why? Because injustice is wrong. God is angry with injustice, when it is committed knowingly, or willingly. And so God's people should have no sympathy with injustice.

LOVE SUPERADDED TO JUSTICE

If the children of God do not carefully cultivate the quality of justice, they will get themselves into that attitude where they will not appreciate justice at all. But while appreciating what is right and what is wrong, we are to go further, and see that we cultivate diligently the quality of love, sympathy, charity. None can say that his own estimate of what constitutes justice and love is entirely right, and that the other man's estimate is entirely wrong, especially

when this other is a brother or sister in Christ, seeking to develop the same Christlike qualities as ourself. Our viewpoints cannot be always the same; therefore let us not be too sure that our own viewpoint is the correct one, and the other view wrong, where there is any possibility of our being mistaken.

No follower of Christ is so well developed that he can say, I do not need any further instruction along the lines of justice and love, but my brother needs it. And in our experiences with the brethren, where the other one seems to be at fault, let us say to ourselves, Here is a brother who perhaps has had more disadvantages than I have had. He is a brother of mine according to the Spirit. He seems to me to be doing wrong, but I sympathize with him because he probably does not know that his action is wrong. Or I may be wrong myself. If he saw the matter from my viewpoint, he would do differently. I will not judge him, but leave that for the Almighty, who is infallible in judgment and to whom judgment belongs. – 1 Corinthians 4:5.

SYMPATHY FOR ALL MEN

God has no sympathy with *sin*; but He has so much sympathy for sinners that He has provided His well-beloved Son to redeem and uplift the sinner. He has set apart a thousand years for this work of human uplift. We note injustice; we ought to note it. But it is not our province to flay, to inflict punishment. We are to "judge nothing before the time." We see acts committed that shock our moral sense. We are to say to ourselves, I believe that act to be criminal; but it is not for me to settle with that wrong-doer. God knows to what extent the individual is responsible; I do not. It is my duty as far as possible to view him from the standpoint of sympathy. It is my duty to assist him if it is in my power, if I have a proper opportunity – to help him out of his wrong views into right views. But even in this I am to be "wise as a serpent, and harmless

as a dove." The conduct is wrong, but I cannot know how wrong the individual may be.

So Love looks out and sees that the whole world is in much difficulty through the fall. And Love says, Be gentle toward all; be meek; be forbearing. We are ever to remember that we are in a world of sin, pain, sickness, death. From this viewpoint, Love will not be easily provoked, but will think kindly and sympathetically of others. Thus, beloved, shall we grow up into Christ, our glorious Head, in all things, until, made perfect and complete through His grace, we shall be presented to the Father "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing." – Ephesians 5:27.

