

OUR PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO GOD

"See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men."
– 1 THESSALONIANS 5:15.

THIS text is a part of the counsel of the Apostle Paul to the Church at Thessalonica, in connection with his message on the subject of the Second Coming of our Lord. He reminds them how carefully and faithfully they should live, who had such hopes of glory, such hopes of being gathered to Christ at His appearing and Kingdom. He exhorts them that they "warn the unruly," that they "comfort the feeble-minded" [faint-hearted], that they "support the weak" [those not strong in the faith, comparatively undeveloped]. Then in the words of our text, he urges that "none render evil for evil unto any."

We do not understand the Apostle to mean that no one in the Church should be permitted to render evil for evil. It would not be in the power nor in the jurisdiction of any one to see that none others do evil. The only ones who have such power or authority would be God Himself and His great Representative, Christ Jesus. In fact, if we undertake to see that no man renders evil for evil, we shall be busybodying in every man's matters; we shall cultivate the habit of evil-surmising, and shall have no time for our own business. The Apostle means, Let each one see to it that *he* does not return evil for evil. This principle is to govern each; each is to exercise care in his *own* case.

The thought seems to be that we should be critical of our own motives, of the principles underlying our own conduct. We should reason, "I am about to do so and so. Is this course right?" We should judge our actions in advance. We should not go blundering along, failing to take ourselves in hand, and then say, after the thing is done,

"Well, I intend to make amends." Of course we should make amends if we have done wrong. But we should get into the habit of so controlling our mind that it would preclude our doing what we should not do.

While in the flesh, of course we shall never attain perfection in action or words, but we should earnestly endeavor to do our best to attain this. We shall not do our best unless we set ourselves very diligently about it, and determine that we will by the help of the Lord attain as full control of our flesh as is possible. If we make up our minds that we will conquer, much can be accomplished.

ALL THE SAINTS STRONG CHARACTERS

The Savior so loved to do right that He laid down His life for righteousness' sake. Thus it is to be with all who are under His banner, fighting a good fight. But there is a natural tendency to retaliation, especially in persons who have the disposition of conquerors – the very class that God is now seeking. These are the ones who have the qualities of an overcomer. They have a strong individuality; they have a will. They are not supine; they are not merely placid. Those to whom Truth appeals are strong characters; and people of naturally strong character are inclined to carry out the Law of Moses – "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" – in the cases of those who have done wrong.

But the Lord's injunction to the Church is to the contrary, for this is the way of the sinful world. God has not yet forced the world into obedience to righteousness; in the Millennial Age He will do this. The special people who have followed Jesus from the world into consecration to God are pledged to do the will of God, to support the right. Being strong characters, they wish to correct that which is wrong. That is a natural impulse and a good one. But we must remember that it is not the time now for us to judge and discipline the world. The Scriptures say, "Judge nothing before the time." We are therefore to await God's time. If the matter is a legal

one, and we are personally wronged by process of law, we are to yield to it in the right spirit, even though it be unjust. Let us wait for the Lord's time and way to set things straight.

THE CHRISTIAN NOT A GENERAL POLICEMAN

If you receive a double injury, there would be a double reason why you would wish to correct it. The inclination to try to do so would rise, but there should be nothing like retaliation. We are not to return evil for evil. We are under responsibility to do evil to none. The expression, "See that none render evil for evil," has been understood by some to signify that the Christian should be a kind of general policeman, to see that his brethren, his neighbors, and everybody else, do no one harm. This is a mistaken idea. There seems to be a certain exception, however, in the case of the head of a family. As the head of the house, one would be responsible to the civil law, as well as to the Divine Law, for the conduct of his household.

Some have supposed that this injunction of the Apostle means: Let the Elders of each congregation see that the members of the congregation do no wrong. This likewise is not the right thought. This Scripture does not give an Elder any more right to *see* that none render evil in return for evil than it does any one else. The passage seems to mean this: Let each of you see that you do not *yourself* render evil for evil.

There might be some ways in which it would be proper for any member of a family to render help to another member who was being wronged. If, for instance, one [R5645 : page 73] saw another doing injustice to a third, he might remonstrate. He might say, Brother (or Sister), do you not think so and so about this matter? And so with the Church. But the Elders are charged more especially with looking after the interests of the Church. If they should see some one in the Ecclesia not living up to the Scriptural standard, it

would be quite proper to make a suggestion to that one about the matter. But we must not be busybodies in other people's affairs.

We are to build one another up; for thus the Bride makes herself ready. These matters should be approached only after prayer and in the very wisest way possible, lest we do more harm than good. Let us remember that we are consecrated to righteousness, to follow that which is good. Let us also remember that not merely in the Church are we to render no evil for evil, but amongst all men; for we have pledged our lives to follow that which is good under all conditions and circumstances.

According to the standard of God's Word, the disciples of Christ should be the most polished, the most courteous, the most refined, the most generous, the most kind and considerate, of all people. Theirs should not be merely an outward appearance of these graces, so common to the world, but should be a kindness, a gentleness, which springs from the heart, because of the possession of the Lord's Spirit, the spirit of justice, of mercy and of love. Thus they are to let their light shine in their lives.

DIFFERENT INSTRUCTIONS DURING JEWISH AGE

Under the Jewish Law it was different in some respects. Every Jew was an avenger of God, to render just punishment for any crime. He who sins shall suffer, was the principle; and this is a right principle. During the period of the Law Dispensation it was very necessary, **[R5645 : page 74]** evidently, that these lessons of just retribution for sin should be deeply impressed upon the people of Israel. So during that time it was commanded that if a man shed blood, by man should his blood be shed. (Exodus 21:12; Leviticus 24:13-20; Numbers 35:9-33.) If they saw their neighbor do a wrong, they were to help adjust that wrong. They were to have this principle of justice thoroughly ingrained, because it is a principle of God's character. This rule held good from the days of Noah. (Genesis 9:6.)

It is right, too, that laws of justice be enforced by the world at the present time as far as they are able.

When Christ's Kingdom is set up, The Christ will know how to make all due allowances for those who are weak. But we are instructed from the Scriptures that the Lord's people in the present time are not to judge the heart nor to be the avengers of justice. Neither are we to attempt to exact justice for ourselves; but we are to learn and to practise the principles of kindness, mercy and love. The Church are to live on a different plane, a higher plane, than any others, not rendering evil for evil, but, contrariwise, returning good for evil.

We are to bear in mind that we are ourselves imperfect. We are to learn, as disciples of Christ, the great lesson of compassion. We are to show mercy by and by, when exalted to positions of power, wherever conditions shall present themselves as needing mercy; and such conditions will abound; for all will be imperfect and weak until they can progress up out of their fallen state. So if we would be fitted for that responsible and honorable position of judges of the world, we must develop the qualities of love, mercy, compassion, now. We must learn to be very pitiful with the brethren and with the world of mankind, but must take heed to ourselves. Remembering our personal responsibility to the Lord, we are to judge our own course, and see that we ever "follow that which is good," both among the brethren and with all men.

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