

## DID JESUS REVILE HIS ENEMIES?

"Who when He was reviled, reviled not again." – 1 Peter 2:23.

NATURALLY the question arises, How shall we harmonize St. Peter's statement in this text with the fact that our Lord denounced the Scribes and Pharisees and Doctors of the Law as hypocrites, as a generation of vipers, etc.?

We recall the evidence presented in the Gospels. St. Peter was one of the twelve Apostles and hence was with our Lord continually during His earthly ministry, and evidently, therefore, a very good witness of the fact that the Master did not return reviling for reviling. The import of the Apostle's words was that Jesus did not retaliate. When evil things were spoken of Him, He did not speak evil of those who did Him injury. He did not call down curses upon their heads, but committed Himself to God and left His cause in the hands of Divine Justice.

The Evangelists record some of these revilings against our Lord. On one occasion His enemies said of Him, "He hath a devil and is mad." Again, Jesus Himself implied that He was also called "Beelzebub" – prince of devils. The Scribes and the Pharisees acknowledged His *works*, but denounced *Him*, and attributed His good works to Satan. They implied that His birth was illegitimate. They attempted to prove that He was guilty of blasphemy in saying that if the temple were torn down He would erect it again in three days. They did not get the spirit of His teaching, and tried to make out that His statement was sacrilegious. They endeavored to entrap Him in His words. They held that if He were really a great man, He would fellowship with them and not with publicans and sinners. Finally they reviled Him to the extent of crucifying Him between two thieves.

But how was it that Jesus said some very sharp things to the Scribes, Pharisees and chief priests of that day? For instance, He called them a "generation of vipers," "whited walls," "sepulchres full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." On one occasion He said, "Ye hypocrites! Ye can discern the face of the sky; but how is it that ye cannot discern the signs of the times?" Again, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers! How can ye escape the condemnation of Gehenna!" He declared, "Ye are of your father the Devil, for his works ye do." At another time He called them, "Ye fools and [R5679 : page 135] blind," "Ye blind guides," and denounced them saying, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them who are entering to go in...Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is made, ye make him two-fold more the child of Gehenna than yourselves... Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint, anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel! Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee! cleanse first the inside of the cup and of the platter, that the outside may be clean also." Were these revilings? Was not St. Peter mistaken when he wrote the words under consideration? Where does the line of difference come in?

### **JESUS DID NOT STRIKE BACK**

We answer, The line of difference is in that our Lord was not striking back at them; His charges against them were made in advance, and were not, therefore, retaliation against something which they had said to Him. He did not refer to any one of them as having a devil. He spoke of their system in general as being a

pernicious system. If the Lord had not declared that these rulers of Israel were hypocrites, how could we have known that they were hypocrites, when they appeared outwardly very anxious to keep the Law? The people said, "See how these holy men go about and pray on the street corners! Look at their broad phylacteries! We do not see Jesus pray half as much as they pray. And they are always watching, watching, to keep the Law." It was therefore right that our Lord should point out that their watchings, their tithings and their long prayers were hypocritical. They were so very careful about tithing the mint and the anise seed, but had no hesitation about devouring widows' houses – by some technicality getting hold of the property of the needy widow and then swallowing it up themselves.

Jesus declared that on the outside these professedly holy men were indeed ever so white and clean and beautiful, but that on the inside they were vile and unclean. They were of their father the Devil; for they had his disposition. They did not do good and serve God from purity of heart; theirs was merely an outward service. Their whole system was honey-combed with hypocrisy – in the language of today we would term it "rotten." It was necessary that these men be exposed, and all who were pure of heart be saved from the blight of their influence. Jesus called out no one of them by name, but merely denounced them as a class. He was not seeking to do them injury, but good, if possible, and to warn them and all of the evil of such a course. Our Lord wished to deliver the people; therefore He spoke these things about a class; He said some very evil things about that class. It would be for each one of the class to clear his own skirts and to show that he was not leading a double life. Our Lord's words, then, would not come under the head of evil-speaking. He was speaking about a system. He was not telling something secret about John Smith, or saying that Mrs. Brown was so-and-so, doing thus-and-so in private life, etc.

So we believe that we have a perfect right to call attention to the flagrant errors of today. It would not be right to reprove in the way our Lord did; for people would resent it more now than did the Jews of His day. If our Lord had not rebuked some of these things that their leaders did, the people would not have known but that those Pharisees had the Lord's endorsement. There **[R5679 : page 136]** they were going about with sanctimonious faces and saying so many prayers, etc. Were they really holy people? Jesus was there as a Representative of God and Exponent of His views. So Jesus let the people know that these Pharisees were not doing the things pleasing to God. He merely did His duty.

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