

GENTLENESS A CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CHRIST

"The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves." – 2 Timothy 2:24,25.

THE words of our text were addressed by the Apostle Paul to Timothy, an Elder of the Church. The Lord's people, all who belong to the Body of Christ, are sons of God; nevertheless, they are all servants – bond-servants of Jesus Christ. Every true son would desire to serve the interests of his father, especially a just, loving father; and every faithful servant would wish to serve the interests of his master or his employer, particularly a noble, worthy employer or master. Our Lord Jesus, who was the special Son of the Heavenly Father, made Himself Servant of all, in order that He might serve the Father's interests, accomplish His will.

Our text is applicable to any servant of God, any member of the Church of Christ, whether he holds office among the brethren or not. It is an injunction which applies to all of the Church. Every spirit-begotten child of God is to teach according to his opportunity and ability, under the limitations of sex, etc., given in the Scriptures. "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me; because the LORD hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." (Isaiah 61:1.) These words of the Prophet apply to every member of The Christ, Head and Body.

PROPER MANNER OF PRESENTING THE TRUTH

But the Message of the Good Tidings that the Lord has given us to proclaim is not one to be forced upon people. To be proper servants of the Lord, and in harmony with His arrangements, we must not strive, must not argue or quarrel. In meekness we are to

instruct, not with an air of superiority, or a desire to show how much we know. Our Message is for those who have "an ear to hear." We are not to force ourselves upon people, not to intrude upon them, in order to make them hear. While we are to be ready to sacrifice *our own* interests to proclaim the Message of our faith, yet in so doing we are not to be strifeful, malicious or contentious.

We would not say of those who are inclined to be contentious in presenting the Truth that they are not members of Christ, but evidently they have not learned the better way. They have not sufficiently developed the quality of love; they are lacking in Heavenly wisdom in this respect. On one occasion two of our Lord's disciples came from a city of Samaria, the inhabitants of which would not sell them food, and indignantly asked of Jesus whether they should call fire down from Heaven to destroy them. In reply our Lord said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man came not to *destroy* men's lives, but to *save* them." (Luke 9:55,56.) So there are some today who are ready [R5699 : page 166] to quarrel on every occasion. Although this tendency does not prove that they are not children of the Lord, nevertheless, it demonstrates that they are not in the right attitude, that improvement is necessary.

The things pleasing to God are inculcated in the Scriptures. The Lord's followers are to be gentle to all men – not only to the brethren in the Church, but to all others. They are not to be strife-breeders, not always getting into a wrangle, but long-suffering, considerate of the opinions and preferences of others. There may be times when a Christian is put into a position where he will be forced to defend himself; but it is one thing to defend one's self in a reasonable way, and quite another to be strifeful and aggressive.

In endeavoring to carry the Truth to others, we should remember that our faith is not to be presented to everybody. "Cast not your pearls before swine." They will not appreciate your

pearls. They will wish to do you injury because of not appreciating them. But while not strifeful, we are to be on the alert to hold forth the Word of Life. If the Truth is attacked and honest souls [R5699 : page 167] are in danger of being stumbled, we must, as the Apostle enjoined, "contend *earnestly* for the faith once delivered to the saints." (Jude 3.) This does not mean, however, that we are to be quarrelsome, or to be disputatious, in the ordinarily accepted use of those terms. We are to be ever ready to proclaim the Truth on every suitable occasion – with moderation, meekness and humility, but with earnestness and zeal; for this is our business. If those to whom we present the Message of Truth are in the proper attitude, they will desire it. It is right, therefore, for us to be ready to lay down our lives in defense of the Truth and its interests.

The more cool, calm and self-possessed we are when opposed, the better we can defend and recommend the Message we bear. The greater the contrast between our spirit and that of our opposer, the stronger will be our argument for the Truth in the minds of others who may hear; and the more likely shall we be to disarm prejudice in the mind of the opposing one, if he be sincere and honest of heart. One who loses his self-control and becomes combative and disputatious defeats his own cause. One should never lose his head. He will be sure to say things that were better left unsaid and to manifest by tone and manner that he is not actuated by the Spirit of the Master. More harm than good might result from such a mistake. We are always to present the Message gently, kindly, forcefully. It may be necessary to be positive in our statements, but the spirit of the presentation is to be gentle, whether in private or in public.

QUALIFICATION OF A TRUE TEACHER

The Apostle says that the servant of the Lord should be "apt to teach." (1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:24.) St. Paul was here especially addressing an Elder in the Ecclesia. To be apt to teach

is to have the teaching ability. Not all have the ability, the gift, of making things plain to others. There are some people who the more they say the less they are understood. If there are some who find themselves in this condition, they should use printed matter and then try to learn how to present the Message in a way that will be assimilable to the minds of others – making it clear, plain and logical. In the presentation of the Message to others patience is necessary. Be willing to go over the point again and again, having sympathy with those you are instructing, remembering how difficult you found it when you were trying to emerge from darkness into the light.

Whether presenting the Truth publicly or in private, never assume an air of superiority, never manifest haughtiness. Never allow yourself to become so irritated as to say, "I know more about this in five minutes than you do in a year"; nor even imply this thought in the expression of your face, or in tone or manner. You see, you can express yourself in these four different ways at once; but any one of the four would be sufficient to place a barrier between yourself and those whom you were endeavoring to interest. You are to be meek, lowly of heart, humble.

If some one presents to you an argument or a Scripture that he thinks contradicts your position, say to him, "Well, brother, let us see whether that is in harmony with the teachings of the Bible. We must accept as Truth only that which will harmonize all the statements of the Word of God. Let us prove the matter." Have a meek, teachable manner, one which shows that you are willing to learn from another if he can teach you something from the sure Word of the Lord. Thus your opponent will be more willing to hear what you have to say, if he is disposed to be at all reasonable.

Undoubtedly the Lord's people are learning more and more the lesson inculcated in our text – "the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all." It is a lesson that all must learn,

Elders and Deacons and every member of the Body of Christ. It is necessary to our own character-building, and necessary in order that we may do more effective service for the Master. When at first we buckled on the armor and took up the Sword of the Spirit, we probably did some flourishing, and perhaps often did more harm than good. We felt that we had something that no one could argue down. But we have been learning to be more gentle, more wise, more patient, more loving; and thus we have become better qualified to be instructors of others. We have seen how we may injure the Cause of the Lord by a wrong presentation of the Truth, and how by proper presentation we may become more successful in doing the Lord's work, in reaching hungry hearts, and more pleasing to our great King, whom we all love and long to serve.

