

NON-RESISTANCE OF EVIL

"See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men." "Resist not evil." – 1 Thessalonians 5:15; Matthew 5:39.

PERHAPS every well-balanced man has a natural disposition to exact justice from those who do him harm. There is a sense of justice apparently in all people, which leads them to feel that, if they have been unjustly treated, some punishment should be meted out to those who mistreated them; and their first impulse is to exact justice. God's Law is based upon justice, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." Our minds instinctively recognize this Law of Retribution.

During the existence of the Jewish nation, their Law required that justice should be done. If the ox of Shimei the Benjamite gored the ox of Eliab the Zebulunite, then Shimei's ox was to be killed or the full amount of damage met by him; for the owner of the gored ox must be fully recompensed. And so it was in all matters.

The principle of justice is a proper one. It would be ill for the world if justice were not recognized. In the world's courts there is an attempt to give justice, so that if one's ox is gored the owner could go to the courts and have redress. We see the righteousness of this arrangement, the wisdom of it. But in the case of the Church, the Lord has made a new provision. The Church is called out of the world, and its members are to realize that they are no longer of the world. They are to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. They are to suffer injustice. Jesus gave Himself up to suffer for the unjust. Those who are followers of Jesus are to have His spirit of sacrifice in the interests of others. Whoever does not follow His example in this respect demonstrates that he has not the Spirit of Christ. And whoever has not the Spirit of Christ would better not start to follow in His footsteps; for such will not be sharers in His glory.

CHRISTIANS NOT TO EXACT JUSTICE

"Even Christ pleased not Himself." When He was evil entreated, He did not say, "Do not harm Me or I will retaliate." Such was not the Lord's spirit. He knew that He would be maltreated. He remembered the commission which the Father had given Him. He bore in mind that those with whom He had to do were fallen. He did not seek to get justice from them. He submitted the whole matter to the Father; and on behalf of the whole world, even of those who were doing Him injustice, He died, that by and by all might be reconciled to God through His death.

As followers of Jesus, we, like Him, resign our rights rather than try to get them. So we are different from others. We have a knowledge of God's Plan for the forgiveness of sin. We are suffering as members of the Body of Christ, filling up that which was left behind of the sufferings of our Head, and we are to rejoice in the privilege of doing this. But if we were to render evil for evil and to exact justice from everybody, we would be losing our privilege of sacrificing for righteousness' sake; for the Divine arrangement is that if we suffer with Jesus in the interest of the same truths for which He suffered, if we become dead with Him, we shall live and reign with Him. If, therefore, we should have the independent spirit of the world, and should say, "If you do injury to me I will surely get even with you," we would not have the Spirit of Christ.

Jesus knew that it was the Father's will that He should be a Sin-Offering, that He should suffer "the Just for the unjust." And He invites us to walk with Him in this way, to be sharers of His sufferings, and thus be sharers in His glory in the Kingdom. It behooves each of the Lord's followers therefore to see that he does not render evil for evil. The Apostle might have been understood to mean, Let no man render evil for evil to the brethren; but he makes it broader and says, "unto any man" – not merely among yourselves follow that which is good, but among all mankind.

APPEALS FOR JUSTICE SOMETIMES PROPER

This does not mean that it would not be proper under some circumstances to appeal for justice to the law, in whatever country we might be living; but it means that when the law has decided the matter against us we should submit. If the law should take away your coat and your cloak, be submissive to the law. To a certain extent we are to permit ourselves to be imposed upon. If the case be one merely of personal feelings, there would be no proper ground for resistance. If the case be one that affects the Lord's Cause, it would seem to be a matter of appeal for relief, that we might get whatever the world is willing to give us which would be for the furtherance of the Gospel.

We see that in our Lord's case, when He was unjustly sentenced, He inquired respecting the justice of the matter. He put the matter to the Court. This was not resistance. In the case of St. Paul, we remember not only that he fled from some places where they persecuted him, but that in other cases he appealed, which it was wise to do, to a higher tribunal. In one instance, perceiving that the whole matter was one of injustice, and seeing that the mob around him were of two kinds – some being Sadducees and some Pharisees, with the Pharisees being in the majority, He called out, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. For the resurrection of the dead am I called in question!" Thus he appealed to the Pharisee element of the crowd, and set them more or less at variance with the Sadducees. He said, I am like the Pharisee in my belief of a resurrection from the dead. He did no evil to the Sadducees, but merely sought to bring to his sympathy and support those who had some faith and interest in the resurrection, that thus he might dissuade them from persecution of himself. In another instance, the Apostle was about to be beaten unjustly; and as they were binding him he said to a centurion standing by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?" This immediately brought the Apostle release from his distressing circumstances. He did not say, "If you beat me, I will make it a sad day for you!" We do not know that St. Paul would even

have reported the matter, if he had been unjustly treated. We have every reason to suppose that he would not have done so. On another occasion, when he was beaten very sorely, we have no knowledge that he endeavored to prevent the injustice. He merely [R5898 : page 149] accepted it as of the Lord's permission.

In the case in which he referred to his Roman citizenship and asked, Does the law give you the right to do me harm? we are given a clue as to our own proper course under similar circumstances. We, likewise, could say, if unlawfully arrested or interfered with in doing the work of the Lord, "Are you acting according to the instructions of the law? Am I violating any of its provisions? Have I not the rights of a citizen of this state?" And if the officer was exceeding his authority, the provisions of the law should be pointed out in a reasonable manner, without any manifestation of a retaliatory spirit.

THE DIVINE LAW OF LOVE

Coming back to the matter of rendering evil for evil: we might be asked, Suppose that a burglar entered our house and we could find the burglar, should we put him in prison? One view would be, "Yes; put him in prison [R5898 : page 150] Make it a sore day for him." Another view would be, "No; we have no desire for revenge. We do not wish to do him injury in return." At the same time here is a man at large, violating the laws and menacing the safety and interests of the community. So we would feel that we should report the man to the authorities and turn him over to justice. We would wish to shield the public and also to check the evil-doer in his wrong course.

This seems to be the thought of the Scriptures – that so far as our hearts are concerned we are to be perfectly willing to endure evil for righteousness' sake; for we are called to suffer for the cause of righteousness. We are not to return evil for evil. We are not to resist evil, in the sense of trying to retaliate and get revenge for injuries done us. Rather let the evil be repeated. This was the Master's course; and it is a part of our covenant with the Lord to share in the

persecution and sufferings of our Head, to endure opposition and injustice for the Truth's sake, for Christ's sake.

The more of this unselfish love we have, the more Godlike shall we be. God is unselfish, whereas the whole world is selfish. It is but natural that mankind should be selfish after six thousand years' experience with sin. Would it not be strange indeed if the whole world were not marked with selfishness, with the desire to advance the interests of self at the expense of others? But this course is contrary to the Divine Law of Love. We, therefore, as children of God, are to endeavor to rid ourselves of personal selfishness and of merely seeking our own good. We are to try to do good to every one as far as possible, according to the course of wisdom and our opportunities, especially to those who are fellow members of the Body of Christ, those traveling the same narrow course of self-sacrifice.

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