

"SUFFER THE WORD OF EXHORTATION"

*"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice, and be ye kind one to another."
– Ephesians 4:31,32.*

THE same Apostle who uses these words of our text has elsewhere classified these evil fruits here enumerated as works of the flesh and of the Devil. He tells us that they that do these things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. He indicates that these traits have come with our fallen nature. But we who have left the world, who have renounced its spirit, are under the most solemn obligations as New Creatures in Christ to bring our fallen nature with its tendencies to evil into full subjection to the new nature, to bring the old creature under control of the mind of God, the Holy Spirit, the holy will, crucifying the flesh and bringing every thought into captivity of obedience to Christ. More and more the Lord is impressing this thought upon us day by day.

St. Paul contrasts these fruits of the Adversary and of the fallen flesh with the precious fruits of the Spirit of God. The one Spirit is Heavenly, Godlike, while the other is "earthly, sensual, devilish." Faith, goodness, meekness, gentleness, patience, peace, self-control, love – these are the Heavenly fruits. They are the very opposite of the spirit of the Adversary. As we endeavor to do the will of God, to cultivate the sweet qualities of the Holy Spirit, we find continual warfare with the inherited weaknesses of our fallen flesh. Some may succeed in a comparatively short time in gaining to a large degree the victory over these works of the flesh and of the Wicked One, while others may have a great war to wage. But the victory over this evil disposition *must be won*; else we shall never be granted an entrance into the Kingdom. The Lord is watching to see the zeal and earnestness with which we strive to put off these works of the fallen flesh, these evil traits of character. Knowing our own natural

weaknesses, each of us is so to watch and guard himself, so to cry unto the Lord for help, so to fill his heart and mind with the Word of the Lord, that he may be kept pure and free from the alloy of sin.

Coming to analyze the Apostle's exhortation of our text, it would seem as if he were mentioning one of the [R5974 : page 312] worst traits first – "all bitterness." Bitterness is an acrid condition, the very opposite of sweetness. It represents a rancor in the heart, and is very closely allied to the last trait mentioned – "malice." Maliciousness in the heart, leads one to malevolence, to seek to do injury to another. The spirit of bitterness and malice, granted an entrance into the heart, is very likely to extend to all the affairs of life and to make complete shipwreck of the New Creature. Its effect is most baneful. While it is possible for one to become angry, and to feel vengeful momentarily, without the feeling amounting to bitterness which would be lasting, without a development of malice, nevertheless, fleshly anger and wrath are sinful, dangerous and certain, if not conquered, to lead to bitterness and malice.

"AS YE WOULD THAT MEN SHOULD DO UNTO YOU"

The Lord's Word admonishes us, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." No matter what provocation one may have had, he should see to it that the matter is settled as quickly as possible. Anger or wrath must not be harbored and cherished; for it is sure to lead to permanent bitterness and hatred. The word *anger* seems not to be so strong a word as *wrath*. Wrath in an imperfect, fallen being, seems to be deep, determined and lasting anger, something that is resentful, retaliatory. *Evil speaking* is a more refined, a more subtle matter, more deceitful, more malicious. Many people become so weak in character, so unbalanced, that they do not realize the proper application of the Golden Rule in their daily lives. They say things of others that they would not wish others to say of them. They treat others in a way that they would not wish to be treated. All such

conduct should be put far away from the Lord's children, from those who have taken God's holy Covenant upon themselves and who profess to be God's ambassadors.

We are not saying that there is no such thing as *righteous* anger, righteous wrath. "God is angry with the wicked every day." Even now His righteous wrath is kindled against the nations of the earth, and He is smiting them to their final overthrow. If all anger is wrong, then God Himself would be guilty of sin. But God's wrath, His anger, is always of a proper kind. It is not fleshly anger or bitterness. God is angry with wickedness, [R5974 : page 313] and this anger signifies that He will punish it. The Scriptures, however, never refer to the Lord as being bitter or malicious. God is Love; He is patient and good, even to the wicked. He does everything in justice and love.

Now if it is right for God to have certain anger, certain wrath, would it be right on our part to exercise anger or wrath on any occasion? There may, as we have intimated, be times when one may properly be angry. For instance, we should properly feel a certain degree of anger against ourselves. If we found that we had not properly improved our opportunities, if we have been careless or negligent in watching our "thoughts, and words and doings," we might well be provoked, even angry with ourselves. But if the heart is right, we should be neither too indignant nor discouraged on account of our failures in this direction, but strive more and more carefully, with the Lord's assistance, to overcome, endeavoring to learn a lesson from every mistake we make.

NEED FOR EARNEST HEART-SEARCHING

Not having the right or the ability to judge the heart of another, we should be very slow to anger, and very careful how we express ourselves. We are to remember that only the Lord has the right to punish. The Lord's people should strive against all of these weaknesses, these blemishes, of the flesh, which are stimulated by

the Adversary and his hosts – anger, wrath, strife, malice, hatred. We should fear these things as we would a plague.

What carefulness, what scrutiny of ourselves, what earnest prayer for help, this thought should bring! How we should guard our tongues against evil-speaking, back-biting, slander, for this is the fruit of lovelessness and malice. And in guarding our tongues, we must remember that it is from the *heart* that these evil words proceed. Therefore our heart must be made and kept so loyal to Christ, so in tune with God's Holy Spirit, that it will not send forth any such bitter waters.

The Psalmist says, "Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth." See also St. Paul's counsel to Titus, 3:2-8, and to Timothy. (1 Tim. 3:11.) Oh, that the spirit of love and kindness and consideration one for another might so richly dwell in every member of the Church of Christ that each one would not only refrain from speaking evil of a brother or sister, but that it would give pain to hear a defamatory tale about any one, and particularly about a fellow-pilgrim in the "narrow way"! If this were the attainment of each member of all the different Ecclesias, how much more closely would they be bound together in the bonds of Christian love!

As we have said before, we believe that the majority of the dear friends are developing more and more of this spirit of love and consideration; but there is still room for improvement in the cases of some, at least. The mischief that can be done with the tongue is almost unlimited. How watchful and prayerful, then, we should be of our influence! We urge a careful rereading of Vol. 6, pp. 583-588, of STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES. It is good that our pure minds be stirred up by way of remembrance. We believe that our time is short in which to complete our work of character structure. This should be impressed upon us more and more as we see one after another of the Body members of Christ passing beyond the veil. Let us seek by prayer and by daily, yea, hourly effort, that we may in all things

become copies of God's dear Son, and hear, when our time shall
come, the Master's sweet "Well done!"

