

Sundry Exhortations

"Bless them that persecute you; bless and curse not. Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Set not your mind on high things, but condescend to things that are lowly. Be not wise in your own conceits. Render to no man evil for evil. Take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men. Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto the wrath of God: for it is written, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord. But if thine enemy hunger, feed him: if he thirst, give him to drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:14-21).

"Bless them that persecute you. Bless and curse not." This exhortation simply echoes Jesus words: *"Resist not him that is evil, but whosoever smiteth thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also"* (Mt. 5:39). Jesus put His words into action. *"When he was reviled, he reviled not against, when he suffered, threatened not"* (1 Pet. 2:23). It is hard not to "curse," to call down God's vengeance upon, those who wrongfully persecute us, it is harder still to bless such. But, such is our Lord's command.

"Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep." The ability to rejoice in the good fortune of another without feelings of jealousy because their good fortune happened to them, not to us; and to have true sorrow for those who reap, sharing their sorrow, requires real character in us and the ability to allow ourselves to become emotionally involved with our brethren in their joys or sorrows.

"Be of the same mind one toward another. Set not your mind on high things but condescend to things that are lowly." Humility of mind is enjoined here, exemplified in Jesus Himself. Although He existed in the form of God before His advent to our world, He humbled Himself, He was made in the likeness of men. He knew poverty, want, sorrow, pain. He even lowered Himself to the minimal task of washing His disciple's feet, against their protests, we might add, and having completed that humble task, said, *"If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you"* (Jn. 13:14f). *"Be not wise in your own conceits."* Again the Spirit reveals, *"Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall"* (Prov. 16:18). Jesus said, *"And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted"* (Mt. 23:12).

"Render to no man evil for evil." Against this echoes the earlier statement, *"Bless them that persecute you ..."* The desire to "get even" may be a strong urge with one who has suffered wrongfully but the apostle warns, *"Avenge not yourselves beloved, but give place unto the wrath of God ..."* There will be a reckoning day with God when He will settle all accounts and all will receive their due recompense from the Lord. To those who have suffered wrong then, they must wait patiently for the Lord. He must *"take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men."* Proper behavior in all things to all men is called forth by these words. We should do nothing that would hint of improper deed or motive. *"If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men."* God's people are peace loving. *"It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling"* (Prov. 20:3). Paul does not command that we compromise in order to have peace, to sacrifice truth, he simply urges that every effort be made to live at peace with all men. Sometimes it cannot be done, as the phrase *"if it be possible"* reveals that the apostle understood this.

Rather than returning *"evil for evil"* or avenging ourselves upon our adversaries, Paul instructs, *"But if thine enemy hunger, feed him: if he thirst give him to drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head."* Nothing can be more accusative than for one to know that he has been an enemy, without cause, to another; that he has shamefully mistreated that one and yet that one has returned his evil with good! If such a measure, returning good for evil received, will not cause such a one to be ashamed, what will?

"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." What wonderful exhortations! What can be more rewarding than to make a friend out of one who was formerly an enemy! What better way than by showing that enemy there is a better way! The behavior called forth by this appeal is not how the world acts, nor what it believes. But Christians are not of this world. Let us make every effort to prove that by the way we live.

Jim McDonald