

DUTIES TO ONE ANOTHER

BY B. G. ECHOLS

Peter is bringing to a close his exhortation to submissiveness by turning from separate classes of Christians to the whole church. It is only when Christians are living properly among themselves that they are really prepared to conduct themselves properly toward others. "Finally, be ye all likeminded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tenderhearted, humbleminded" (1 Pet. 3:8). Christians are to be devoted to the same cause, dedicated to the same Lord, intent on the same victory, and striving for the same goal. Christians should be united and mind the same thing. Division is carnal (1 Cor. 3:4).

What is the best way to obtain unity? By each one striving to conform his life to the pattern given by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:5). Such unity is not the product of indifference. We cannot go forward as a church as we ought until all the saints are in agreement to the goal. We should also be one in feeling. We should share one another's feelings (Rom. 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:26). If two tuning forks are set up in a room and one is struck, the other will take up the same vibration. That is how we are to be. Jealousy and envy should never be allowed to flourish in our hearts for such lead to the destruction of the church.

Compassion or sympathy is the result of deliberate cultivation in our lives. It is not always where we expect it ought to be because some people do not develop it. Sympathy refrains from the word that hurts and the deed that harms (1 Pet. 3:9). Sometimes those who need our compassion show it least, thus it takes real concern on our part to know their need for they never complain. They plow a solitary row. Too often today we are so busy with our own problems and shifting for ourselves that we are isolated from one another, at least in mind (Gal. 6:2).

Loving as brethren is the key to all the other admonitions given in this verse. A Christian is born into the spiritual family of God. This gives a close relationship to the Father's other children. Those whose relationship with their brethren are kept very casual are not really fulfilling their obli-

gations. In brotherly love we come nearest to the spirit of Christ. Brotherly love does not rest on the lovable qualities of another, but on the fact that the person is a child of God just as we. In brotherly love we come nearest to fulfilling the mission of the church for brotherly love aids evangelism and promotes edification.

Love shows itself in tenderness and pity. We are to be touched by the needs of fellow saints. Since there is much sorrow in the world, there is much room to exercise tenderness. Today we are more aware of so much suffering in the world through the media that we tend to be superficially hardened and untouched by it. We just accept it as the way it is. Tenderness too must be cultivated, and if we do, there will be no rudeness in our lives in our handling of others (Eph. 4:32). Unfortunately, there is often a great gulf between our knowledge of the Bible and our lifestyle. How tragic to know the truth of God, but live like the devil.

Peter knew from his own life what a hard lesson being humble-minded is to learn. The humble mind is basic to being a Christian (1 Pet. 5:5). Peter had to learn the hard way. The gospel softens the roughest nature. True Christians must be lowly in spirit. Only humble-minded men can follow the lowly Savior.

These requirements are mainly internal. Now Peter turns to the outward expressions. "Not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling, but contrariwise blessings; for hereunto were ye called, that ye should inherit a blessing" (1 Pet. 3:9).

There are many pressures upon us. Unprincipled people may rip up our reputation. Cruel people may fling one hurt after another at us. Spiteful people may cast our name to the rubbish pile. We are never to give place to evil in our lives regardless of the provocation. This thought goes back to the teaching of the Master in the sermon on the mount (Mt. 5:39).

To revile is to speak against another in bitter, fierce, reproachful terms. Peter forbids retaliation

or revenge in word as well as in deed. Jesus is our example (1 Pet. 2:23). We are never to set out to get even. We are to call for God's blessings on those who would harm us. Why should we do this? The Christian has received nothing but spiritual blessings from God, and, in turn, out of a loving heart, he should bless others. As our calling by God gives us glorious privileges, it also brings us some difficult duties. We should be on the offensive to bring blessings to others. By so acting we exhibit our possession of the same disposition which God possesses, which He desires and designed we have, and which makes us fit for the blessing of eternal life.

God called us to inherit a blessing. We are blessed by God despite our being sinners. We should thus bless others (Eph. 4:32; Luke 6:36). Why should anyone who expects to receive God's blessing and ultimately go to heaven have malice in his heart or a wish to injure anyone?

If you wish to live your life so you will never weary of it and have a life worth living, here is what you should do. It takes effort. "For he that would love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: and let him turn away from evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and pursue it" (1 Pet. 3:10, 11). It is significant that God wants us to enjoy life, but properly. Many think life is boring and frustrating. This is not the way God wants us to see it. Those who are empty themselves find life empty. The "good days" are not necessarily in outward prosperity, but in the favor of God. They are days of usefulness. Here is the way to get the most out of life.

"Refrain" is to "make it cease." The unity and brotherly love advocated earlier can be destroyed quicker by the tongue than anything else. Let us watch it. For ill feelings to be indulged in speech, or deceit to come out, life will be robbed of much of its pleasure. Thus many times when people are miserable, it is something they bring on themselves by sin. Does not a large percentage of the sins in our daily lives arise from an unbridled tongue? "Guile" refers to deceit or trickery. There are gross sins of the tongue as profane and impious words, filthy and impure language, falsehood and guile, slander and gossip, and the more common sins of careless and unprofitable talk which

fills so much of our time. The tongue has great potential for making life miserable. The lips can be the first exit of indwelling evil.

We must make a definite change in direction away from evil (Prov. 4:14, 15). The Lord went about doing good. His disciples must follow His example. It is not enough merely to turn from evil. One must also do positive good (Gal. 6:10). The greatest good is to share the good news of salvation with others.

To "seek peace" is to desire it as a hidden treasure. To pursue it is to press for it as if it would escape. The Lord is the Prince of Peace. His followers must love peace. They should avoid murmurings, jealousy, angry words, etc. We should seek to be peacemakers (Mt. 5:9). We should seek to replace strife and contention between brethren with peace. A peaceful spirit, calm and serene, is favorable to health for such a spirit keeps us from many contentions and strifes which lead to evil days.

The reason God's people must do these things is because God sees all. "For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears unto their supplications; but the face of the Lord is upon them that do evil" (1 Pet. 3:12). He will give the righteous strength. He notes their condition and delights to see their struggles to do His will. Sometimes unbelievers suggest that if people live the way the Bible says, they will be constantly abused and taken advantage of. Such will not be because God watches over the righteous. The Lord hears prayers. God is no respecter of persons, but He does respect those who by faith in Him seek to live properly (Heb. 4:16).

God knows what the evil are doing and we need not retaliate against them. This should remind us of the spiritual consequences of our actions. There should be a widespread understanding that God is contrary to those who are contrary to His laws. The treatment of God is different for different characters. While human nature may be the same, character is decided by each individual. Let us determine to be what God expects, and not allow the world to set our standards.

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