

January 8 – "See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men." 1 Thessalonians 5:15

ACCORDING to the Scriptural standard, the elect church of Christ should be the most polished, the most refined, the most polite, the most generous, the most kind of all the people in the world;—and should be all these in the most absolute sense; not in the mere sense of an outward form and appearance of kindness,

gentleness, etc., so common in the world; but a gentleness, a kindness, proceeding from the heart, proceeding from an appreciation of the Lord's spirit and the spirit of the Truth, the spirit of love, and the spirit of justice, also.

"FINALLY, BE ALL OF ONE MIND."

"Finally, be all of one mind [harmonious--in accord], having compassion one of another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous; not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing, knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing."--1 Peter 3:8,9.

HARMONY does not mean alike-ness. Rather it signifies unity with diversity: and this is the meaning of the Greek word translated "of one mind" in our text. The Lord's will respecting his people does not contemplate exact sameness, wholly ignoring individual characteristics and peculiarities; on the contrary, a diversity with harmony is more desirable than a sameness; as, for instance, it is the harmonious union of the seven colors that constitutes the beauty of the rainbow. So also in music: one strikes a chord on the piano or the organ and the result is harmony, oneness, union--the variety of the notes gives a melody which could not be obtained from any one of them, or from a sameness of equal volume. This is the thought the Apostle's words give us in respect to God's people; they are of various natural temperaments and dispositions and peculiarities, and the divine alchemy by which the human is transmuted into the spiritual, the old mind into the new mind, does not wholly destroy, and is not intended to destroy, the elements of character and disposition; but is intended to take from each one its dross and imperfection and discordancy, and thus to permit all eventually to unite in and develop into a harmonious whole.

The Lord does not expect, however, that this condition of complete harmony, will be attained by his people the instant of their consecration. On the contrary, as the Apostle indicates in our text, this attainment of harmony is the result, the glorious consummation,--rather than the beginning of the work of grace in the Lord's people: he says, "finally," not primarily, we are to be all of one mind--harmonious. It requires long years, generally, in the school of Christ, for his disciples to so grow in grace and in knowledge and in love, --ere they reach the glorious condition expressed in our text, even "finally."

The Apostle Paul intimates that we are to continue so to grow in grace and in knowledge, and in love, as to attain in heart, in will, the stature of a perfect man in Christ. The "babe" in Christ has not the stature of a "man," and requires first the milk of the Word, and subsequently the "strong meat," that it may grow thereby, and finally attain to the ideal condition represented in our text,--a condition of harmony with the Lord and with each other, which indicates that the

work of grace has well progressed--that the mark of perfect love has been well attained in the heart, even though it be not possible still to fully express it in every word and act of life.

The Apostle Paul describes this transformation of life, this growth, saying, "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind;" but while it requires only a short time to give this instruction, and does not require long to agree to follow the instruction, it does require patient perseverance in well-doing to comply with the instructions;--to fully attain to the transformed conditions even in our hearts--so that we will aright, however difficult it may be for us to always do right. And here arises a difficulty: many do not clearly see just what are the requirements, and hence go through life in a maze, in perplexity, in doubt, in fear, lacking the rest and peace and blessing which should come from a proper understanding and a consistent endeavor.

No doubt all have been struck with the fact that those who manifest the deepest interest in the divine plan are not always the most smooth and most agreeable people in the world: frequently they are so combative as to be continually distressing both themselves and their friends by their un wisdom or their disposition to wrangling and contention. The very quality which the Apostle mentions in this text as like-mindedness or harmony is peculiarly lacking, naturally, in the disposition of the majority of those who become deeply interested in present truth. And some have been inclined hastily to condemn the doctrines and to say, This is not the peaceable spirit of Christ. Where the spirit of Christ is there should be love and harmony. So says the Apostle: "Finally, be ye all of one mind." And this should be borne in mind as being the final result of discipline and instruction in the school of Christ; by our attainment of this disposition to harmony (while at the same time loyal and courageous for the truth), we may safely gauge our growth in grace, knowledge and love.

We want to suggest an explanation as to why it is that so many of the Lord's people are combatively disposed. A wrangling and contentious disposition is the result of large combativeness--misdirected--unwisely exercised. Combativeness itself is not a bad quality. On the contrary, it is a good quality,--a quality actually indispensable to the attainment of the prize set before

us in the Gospel. Those who lack combativeness, lack backbone; lack the ability to walk an upright life, under present conditions; they are like a boat on the river which has neither oars nor wheel nor screw-propeller. They can do nothing but float with the current, for they lack the apparatus necessary to stem it. There are many goody-goody people who lack firmness, lack character, lack combativeness, and who could not think of anything else than floating with the popular current; and these frequently are mistaken for "saints" when they are nothing of the kind. They are not even of the kind of material that the Lord takes to make "saints" out of. They are unfit for his purposes under the present call of this Gospel age; for all who are called now to be of the elect Church are called to be "overcomers;" called to be victors; called to stem the popular tide; called to fight a good fight of faith and obedience; and such as are totally lacking in firmness, in combativeness, in character, cannot possibly comply with the conditions, and are not in the race.

So then, if any of those who have grasped the truth, and who have been grasped and drawn by the truth to consecration to the Lord, have at times felt the perversity of their natural dispositions--their combativeness, contentiousness and wrangling disposition, and felt discouraged on this account, let them thank God and take courage. Let them realize that this very disposition constitutes one qualification for enlistment and service under the Captain of our salvation;--although such a service will mean the bringing of this contrary disposition into accord with the spirit of love, which, in the end, will mean that the wrangling disposition will be subdued, and the combativeness be properly turned to good account in another direction.

But while taking all the encouragement we can from the thought that the Lord is wishing and is seeking and calling out a fighting class of "conquerors," who could not be conquerors unless there were something to conquer, and who could not conquer unless they possessed something of the conquering or combative disposition, let us nevertheless, promptly take ourselves in hand, realizing that the good quality of combativeness has in every instance been misdirected, and that from the moment we enlist as soldiers of the Cross of Christ our combativeness is to be turned into new channels. We are to learn, first of all, that our combativeness is not to be exercised toward the Lord, that we should resist his will; but that, on the contrary, we are to make a full surrender to him of our thoughts and words and conduct. We are to remember that combativeness is not to be used toward the brethren; for to fight against the brethren is to fight against God, against the truth, against the fellow-members of our own brigade. Instead of fighting against the brethren, we are to love them, and to fight for them, even as we are to fight for the Lord and for the truth. We are to remember, too, that our combativeness is not to be exercised against our friends, our neighbors, or the world in general. No; all of these have plenty to contend against without having our opposition. On the

contrary, they need our sympathy, they need our help, they need our encouragement, they need whatever we can render them in the way of uplift.

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH.--1 Timothy 6:12.

How, then, and against what shall we exercise our combativeness, that it may be well directed to the Lord's pleasured and in the service of his cause? We answer, that our combativeness is to be turned against sin, and that its first exercise must begin with ourselves: the battle with self is the greatest battle, and we have the Lord's Word for it that he that "ruleth his spirit (his own mind, will) is better than he that taketh a city," because he has to that extent learned to exercise the combativeness of a true character in the right direction, in self-control. It is after we have had considerable experience in battling with sin and selfishness in ourselves, in casting the beam out of our own eyes, in subduing anger, malice, hatred and strife in our own hearts and flesh--it is then, and by means of this severe battle and experience, that we will be prepared to assist the brethren, and to assist our neighbors in their difficulties--to help them to overcome their besetments and weaknesses.

Whoever starts out by fighting even the sins of others before he has made a vigorous campaign against his own weaknesses and errors, is making a mistake. He needs humility and sympathy to assist the others to fight their battles, and this he cannot gain without first battling with himself and learning to appreciate how strong is the foe to be contended with, and how thoroughly entrenched is sin and selfishness in all the avenues of the flesh. He even needs to be worsted in some of his battles with self in order to have a clear appreciation of his own inability to overcome and to force him to go to the throne of the heavenly grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help. He needs this because, as the Apostle says, it is when we are weak that we are strong; and when we are strong in our self-confidence, and therefore neglect to go to the Lord, then we are weak and liable to make failure in the battle, and to be overcome by the enemy--Sin.--Hebrews 4:16; 2 Corinthians 12:10.

All those who have had any experience in the matter, and who have learned how and where to direct their combative energies, find that there is full scope for the exercise of every particle of combativeness he possesses. (1) In himself, continually; as the Apostle expressed it, "I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:27). O, how much of energy and how much persistency in fighting the good fight of faith, and of loyalty to the Lord, is needful in the conquering of self--"bringing every thought [and so far as possible, every word and act] into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Plenty of room here for combativeness; plenty of room for all the contention and wrangling we want;--contention with sin and self-will, wrangling with the will of the flesh and opposing it at every step--mortifying it, killing its affections and

desires. No wonder the Apostle speaks of these present experiences as a fight; no wonder he tells us that we must be prepared to endure hardness as a good soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(2) As soon as the victory over self has been gained, and as soon as the new mind has put a garrison in every quarter of the conquered body, to guard it from rising in insurrection, to hold it in subjection to the King of kings and Lord of lords--forthwith all the remaining energies that can be spared from self-control will find ample opportunity for usefulness in battling for the Lord, battling for the brethren, battling for the truth, battling against error, battling against all the wiles of the devil, "for we are not ignorant of his devices," as the Apostle declares.

(3) As the eyes of our understanding get opened, wider and wider, we see the great conflict that is progressing throughout the world between righteousness and sin, between our Lord and the god of this world and his blinded representatives, who ignorantly think that they are doing God service and are often found fighting against the truth and against the true soldiers of the Cross, their brethren, even as in the case of Paul. We remember how he, as Saul of Tarsus, persecuted the Church, mistakenly misusing his combativeness in a wrong way. We remember how the Lord called to him in the way, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"--Why are you fighting against God, opposing the truth and his cause? In Paul's case we see how that as soon as the eyes of his understanding were opened he became a most valiant soldier of the cross, hesitating not to lay down his life in the service of the Lord and the brethren, who once he had ignorantly opposed.

It was the same combativeness which made Paul a violent persecutor that subsequently made him the most valiant of the apostles in the defense of the truth. And so it was also with others of the apostles. Those who had the largest amount of combativeness naturally, when it was turned into the proper channels, became thereby the strongest and most valiant for the truth. Peter, for instance, full of combativeness, and at first seriously impeded by it, ready in defense of the Lord to smite off the ear of the high priest's servant, was very valiant subsequently in the use of his talents to the Lord's praise. James and John, two others specially favored and recognized of the Lord, and specially used in the service of the truth, were of combative dispositions, so much so that they were known as the "sons of thunder;" and it was these two who were so incensed at the Samaritans who refused to receive our Lord into their city, and who were so full of love and zeal for the Master that they inquired, "Lord, wilt thou that we call down fire from heaven to consume these men and their city?" They had the combativeness, they had the courage, they had the zeal; but they had not yet learned how to direct it, and so the Master intimated, when he said, "Ye know not what spirit ye are of. The Son of Man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." By and by, when they were anointed

with the holy spirit at Pentecost, and had learned gradually what spirit they were of (what spirit the Master was of, and what spirit they must be of as his disciples), they understood better how their combativeness and zeal were to be used. And hence we find them loyal soldiers of the cross, shunning not danger, enduring hardness as good soldiers of the Lord Jesus, even unto death.

It was this natural combativeness consecrated to God, and rightly directed through the spirit, that led Peter and one of the others, when threatened, and charged straitly by the Sanhedrin that they should preach no more in the name of Jesus, to courageously withstand this illegal restraint upon their liberties and rights as Jews, under the Law, and to be obedient to the voice of the heavenly call, and to declare, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). The Lord knew whom he was choosing for his apostles, and we see clearly that weak, vacillating, nerveless men would not have served the cause as did these whom Jesus chose. And it is but reasonable that we conclude that the Lord similarly throughout this age, is seeking for and choosing strong characters, those who dare to do right; who dare to incur the frown of the world and its slights and sneers, its scoffs and its jeers, its persecution because of fidelity to the Lord and to the brethren. This is overcoming;--and to whatever extent any realize that they are deficient in these qualities let them cultivate this combativeness in this proper direction --to combat weakness, combat sin, combat subserviency to those things which are contrary to the Lord and his Word.

FAITH AND THE MESSAGES ALSO ESSENTIAL.

But combativeness alone would not be sufficient. It needs proportionate faith, in order to use the combativeness aright. Hence we hear our Lord's word, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith." Faith in the Lord must be the power that will move his people and energize them. Not faith in creeds, nor faith in men, nor faith in ourselves, but faith in the Lord and in his exceeding great and precious promises. As the steamboat wheels represent its combativeness, by which it battles against and pushes the water, and thus is enabled to go upstream, so its steam-power, through the engine, represents faith, which must be behind the combativeness, to exercise the combativeness--to lead us to endure hardness, to direct us in fighting the good fight and to hope for the rewards to be attained.

Similarly the fuel and the boiler generating the steam represent the Word and providences of God, which produce in us the cause, the power of the faith which energizes us in stemming the current. The exceeding great and precious promises of the divine Word were given to us as the basis of faith,--as the fuel to produce the power in us to will and to do God's good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). And hence these gracious promises must not be neglected; they must be contin-

ually used and must continue in us to energize us. And the energy must be applied, and we must progress proportionately against the course of this world, if we would attain to the glorious conditions to which we have been called.

While we should ever remember (lest otherwise we should be discouraged), that the attainment of a control of our own spirits, our own minds, and the bringing of these into full accord, full harmony, with the Lord and, so far as possible, into accord with all of the Lord's people who are in accord with him, is to be "finally," nevertheless we are not to delay our endeavor to reach that final and grand development to which the Apostle exhorts us in our text. We are to have it continually before us as the standard, the ideal, the aim, and although we may fail time and again, if we are rightly exercised in the matter we will be stronger as the result of every failure; for each failure will show us more clearly than we discerned previously the weak points of our characters, naturally resulting from the fall. And if each weak point be carefully noted and guarded against as respects the future we will come by and by, by the grace of God and under the direction of our great Teacher, by his Word and example, and providential leadings, to that subdued condition, that harmonized condition, which would accord to the expression of the text. And to such, looking back, even the failures which subsequently recognized led to greater fortification against the wiles of the Adversary and the weaknesses of the flesh, may be seen to have been overruled by the Lord for our blessing according to his promise that all things shall work together for good to them that love him.

As we finally, in larger and larger measure, attain to harmony--to the subduing of our natural dispositions toward contention, gradually getting these combative tendencies into accord with the Lord and his Word and his Spirit, and into accord with those who are his, our fellow-soldiers in this battle for the right, our condition will be what the Apostle here describes; viz., we will have compassion one of another. We will expect to see and will see "the brethren" striving for the mastery over self and we will be sympathetic, compassionate; so that if they err through weakness of the flesh, we will be glad to restore such in the spirit of meekness, remembering ourselves also lest we should be tempted (Galatians 6:1). We will love them as brethren ought to love--heartily, thoroughly--such a love and such a sympathy, such a compassion, as would lead us to do everything within our power for their assistance;--especially along the lines of spiritual assistance, in the conquering of sin, and in growth in grace and knowledge and love;--but, nevertheless, also in temporal matters as we have opportunity, as may be possible to us.

This compassion and brotherly love amongst the spiritual brethren, even as respects temporal matters, cannot surely be less than it would be amongst natural brethren. Indeed, inasmuch as the spiritual relationship is the higher, the nobler, the grander of the two,

without detracting anything from the love and affection and obligations toward the fleshly brotherhood, it would imply that the spiritual would appeal to us still more strongly, so that we would do all for a brother in Christ in a temporal way that we would do for any earthly brother--and more abundantly. The Apostle sets this standard, saying, that we are to "do good unto all men as we have opportunity, especially to the household of faith."

This of course does not mean that we are to be negligent of those of our own immediate households and our special responsibilities to these; but it does mean that aside from these, the spiritual brethren should have the first place in our hearts and in our sympathies and in our love, and in all that this would imply in the way of sharing with them both the spiritual and the temporal good things which we enjoy, according to their necessities. Those who have reached this condition of heart-harmony with the Lord and with his gracious plan will have had such an experience in attaining to this position themselves that it will make them pitiful of others,--sympathetic in the difficulties and trials of others; and it will make them "courteous," polite, "gentle toward all."

In a word, according to the Scriptural standard, the elect Church of Christ should be the most polished, the most refined, the most polite, the most generous, the most kind, of all the people in the world;--and should be all these in the most absolute sense; not in the mere sense of an outward form and appearance of kindness, gentleness, etc., so common in the world; but a gentleness, a kindness, proceeding from the heart, proceeding from an appreciation of the Lord's spirit and the spirit of the truth, the spirit of love, and the spirit of justice, also. It is a great matter that we learn to be thoroughly just, and in all of our affairs to do unto others as we would wish them to do unto us,--that we accord them the same liberties that we ourselves would wish to enjoy. Truly, the law of God is a wonderful law, and truly the people who are taught of the Lord and trained in harmony with the divine will, must be a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Combative people will always (while in the flesh) feel a disposition to retaliate; but those who have learned of the Lord the lesson of self-control, and who have developed meekness and brotherly-kindness and pity, will thereby be prepared to fulfil the demands of our text,--to not render evil for evil, or railing for railing. And looking to the Lord as the pattern they will see how it was with him, that "When he was reviled he reviled not again." Not because his enemies had found in him something that could properly and justly be reviled and evil spoken of;--nor because his enemies were so nearly perfect that he could find nothing in them to revile and speak evil of; but because he was so full of submission to the divine will that he was enabled to take the scoffs and railings of the people, and to bear these humbly and patiently, and to remember that even hereunto he was called, that he should endure patiently and learn the lessons, and prove himself

faithful, and develop and demonstrate his true character, and feel and manifest his pity for the people, in their blindness and ignorance, and his love for them.

And so it must be with us as we grow in our Lord's character-likeness. We also will be less disposed to rail at those who rail, and to revile those who revile us. We also will be ready to suffer the loss of all things, and to do so with cheerfulness; yea, even to rejoice in the trials and difficulties of this present time, knowing, as the Apostle declares, that these are working out for us a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory. We note here the harmony between Peter's statement of this matter and our Lord's statement of it: "Bless them that curse you; bless and curse not" (Philippians 3:8; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:14). So the Apostle says we should rather render blessing. If we have not yet attained to this high standard which is at the end of the race, the mark of perfect love, where we love our enemies and are ready and willing and anxious to bless them, to help them, to desire their uplifting out of darkness and degradation, and to wish and do all that we can in harmony with this, the divine plan, let us not be discouraged; but let us press onward, that as soon as possible we may reach this point, which is the mark of perfected character. For, as the Apostle says, "even hereunto we were called, that we might inherit a blessing."

THE BLESSED INHERITANCE FOR WHICH WE ARE BEING PREPARED.

We were called to be the Royal Priesthood, under Jesus, the Royal High Priest of our profession. We are instructed in the Scriptures that this royal priesthood is to be God's agency during the Millennial age for bringing blessing to the world of mankind, and "hereunto we were called" that we might be fitted for this priesthood. The Apostle tells us that in the preparation of our Lord Jesus and his testing as to fitness for the position of high priest, it was necessary that he should be tempted, tried, and caused to suffer, in order that he

might be a merciful and faithful high priest when the time should come to exercise the authority and power of his office. Similarly it is necessary that all who would be of this Royal Priesthood should have such experiences now as would develop in them also these principles of truth, righteousness--such experiences as would lead them to love righteousness and to hate iniquity--such experiences in battling with self and in gaining control (at least so far as the mind, the will is concerned), as would constitute them victors and develop in them these graces of the spirit mentioned by the Apostle, brotherly kindness, pitifulness, compassion. All these qualities will be requisite in dealing with the world during the Millennial age. They will be merciful and faithful high priests, because they will know how to sympathize with the poor world in its fallen condition, and how to make allowances for them in their various efforts toward regaining the standard of perfection then to be established through restitution processes.

We will be kings as well as priests then. As kings, we will be endowed with power to control the world. This will be a further proper use of combativeness; but we are not fitted and prepared to so control the world in the present time; and therefore the Lord directs his people to wait, and long for, and pray for his Kingdom to come, and his will to be done;--to be enforced with heavenly power and authority. These "very elect" kings and priests will be fully qualified to exercise their power in moderation, for then they will have the new bodies in perfect accord with the new minds;--the new minds which are now being developed, disciplined and brought to that standard of perfect love, which is full of pity, compassion, brotherly kindness and harmony. How necessary, dear brethren, that we learn these lessons, if we would be prepared to be used in the glorious service of the Kingdom so shortly to be established. ▲

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