

"Love thinketh no evil." 1 Corinthians 13:5

WHOEVER neglects the Lord's commands along this line of "evil surmisings" weaves a web for his own ensnarement, however "circumspectly" he may walk as respects other matters; for a heart impregnated with doubt and suspicion toward fellow creatures is more than half prepared to doubt God: the spirit of sourness and bitterness is at war with the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of love. Either the one or the other will conquer. The wrong spirit must be gotten rid of, or it will defile the new creature and make of him a "castaway." On the contrary, if the new nature conquer, as an "overcomer," it will be along this line: if evil surmisings are overcome, half the battle against present difficulties and besetments is won.

"BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL."

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

Ephesians 5:15,16

THE WORD "circumspect" is from *circum*, signifying around, and *spectus*, signifying to look, to watch. The true Christian pathway is so narrow, so beset with tests and pitfalls and wiles of the evil one, that, if we walk carelessly even (not to say wickedly), we will be in great danger of mishap. It requires not only that we look all around at every step, but, more than this, it requires that we be wise,--wiser than our fellow creatures of earth,--wise with the wisdom that cometh from above, which is pure, peaceable, loving; yet first of all loyal to the Lord and his Word.

At a centre to which flow by mail the records of the trials and difficulties through which many of the Lord's people are called to pass, we are in position to know that their trials are now more numerous and more severe than for a long time at least. Appeals for prayer on their behalf and for counsel respecting the way of the Lord come by nearly every mail from tried ones who are anxious to "walk circumspectly." These are gladly answered, to the best of our ability,--pointing out the Scriptural lines that must guide all who would walk with the Lord.

We now wish to call attention to some general principles, applicable to every member of the body of Christ, at every time; and especially necessary to be remembered and practiced at the present time, because of the special activity of our Adversary;--"because the days are evil." For it would appear that, as in the "harvest" of the Jewish age, so in the present "harvest" of the Gospel age, opposition prevails not only in the synagogues, from the Scribes and Pharisees, but in the home circle--between parents and children, and husbands and wives--and among the Lord's people. And in proportion as the Adversary seeks to stir up strife, let each of the consecrated be the more on guard to give no avoidable offense either in word or deed. "Walk circumspectly,...because the days are evil,"--days of special trial and testing.

HELPFUL RULES FOR DAILY LIFE.

The rules we have to suggest are as follows:--

I. Let each resolve to mind his own business.

The Scriptural injunctions along this line caution us not to be busy-bodies in other people's affairs. Everyone of

experience in life has learned that this is a good rule; yet few walk by this rule, circumspectly. If we have not sufficient of our own business and of the Lord's service to fill our hands and moments and mouths, there is something wrong with us that needs careful prayer and study of the divine Word to set right.

This does not mean that we should be indifferent to the welfare of others under our care, or for whom we are in any degree responsible; but, even in doing for these we should be careful to recognize their rights and the rights of others, and specially careful not to exceed our own rights. Let us never forget that justice must govern in our interferences with the affairs of others, though we may not require full justice in respect to our own interests, but exercise mercy.

II. We should exercise great patience with others and their faults--more than in dealing with ourselves and our own short-comings.

When we remember that the whole world is mentally as well as physically and morally unsound through the fall, it should make us very considerate for their failings. Since the Lord is graciously willing to cover our blemishes with the merit of the precious blood, we cannot do less than be "very pitiful" and of tender compassion towards others;--even though their failings be greater or different from our own. This general rule is specially applicable to your own children. Their defects to some extent came from you or through you; hence, in dealing with their faults, you should do just as in correcting your own faults,--earnestly, rigorously, for their correction in righteousness, but sympathetically, mercifully, lovingly.

III. Do not be touchy and easily offended. Take a kindly, charitable view of the words and acts of others. A trifling slight or rebuff could well be passed unnoticed--covered with the mantle of generosity and love. A serious offense should be assumed to be unintentional, and inquiry should be kindly made in words that would not stir up anger, but in "speech seasoned with grace." In a majority of cases it will prove that no offense was meant.

This rule in the Scriptures comes under the instructions not to indulge in "evil surmisings,"--imagining evil intentions and motives behind the words and acts of others. "Evil surmisings" is ranked by the Apostle as contrary to the words of our Lord Jesus, opposed to godliness, and of the same spirit as envy and strife--of a corrupt mind, works of the flesh and the devil.--1 Timothy 6:3-5; Galatians 5:19-21.

LOVE THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT.

The other side of this subject is brought out by the Apostle's injunction respecting the elements of the spirit of love, of which God's people are begotten and which they are to cultivate daily,--the development of which is one of the chief proofs of their being "overcomers." He says, "Love suffereth long and is kind,...is not easily offended, thinketh no evil,...beareth all things, believeth all things [favorably], hopeth all things, endureth all things."

It may be urged that such a disposition would be imposed upon frequently, by the evilly disposed. We reply that those who possess this spirit of love are not necessarily obtuse nor soft: their experiences in cultivating this degree of love have served to develop them and make them of "quick understanding in the fear of the Lord." They will be cautious where there is even the appearance of evil, even while avoiding the imputation of evil intentions until forced to concede them by indisputable evidence. Besides, it would be better far to take some trifling risks and suffer some slight losses, many times, than to accuse even one innocent person. And the Lord who has directed this course is abundantly able to compensate us for any losses experienced in following his counsel. He is both able and willing to make all such experiences work together for good to those who love him. He places obedience to his arrangements first (even before sacrifice) saying, "Ye are my disciples, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

Whoever neglects the Lord's commands along this line of "evil surmisings" weaves a web for his own ensnarement, however "circumspectly" he may walk as respects other matters; for a heart impregnated with doubt and suspicion toward fellow creatures is more than half prepared to doubt God; the spirit of sourness and bitterness implied is at war with the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of love. Either the one or the other will conquer. The wrong spirit must be gotten rid of, or it will defile the new creature and make of him a "castaway." On the contrary, if the new nature conquer, as an "overcomer," it will be along this line: if evil surmisings are overcome, half the battle against present difficulties and besetments is won. The surmisings are from the heart, and lead us either to good words and acts, or to evil words and acts.

IV. If you have been slandered, you may explain, to set yourself right, either publicly or privately; but surely avoid doing more than this. If you slander in return you make two wrongs out of one. Let no man render

evil for evil to any one;--no, not even if what you should tell be the truth, while what your neighbor told was falsehood. And in contradicting and explaining false charges, remember not to go beyond this to make counter-charges against your defamer; for thus you also would become a slanderer.

THE GOLDEN RULE.

This is the Scriptural rule. We are to do unto others as we would that they should do unto us, and not as they do unto us. The wrongs done toward us will never justify wrong doing on our part. God's true children are to have no sympathy with Satan's delusion--"Do evil that good may result." But while no Scripture forbids our explaining away the errors and false statements of slanderers, experience proves that, if we followed Satan and his deluded servants of unrighteousness around, to contradict every adverse criticism and evil report, we should be kept more than busy. And if Satan found us willing to do so, he would no doubt lead us such a chase as would prevent our having any time to tell forth the good tidings of great joy; thus he would gain a victory, and we should lose one.

Rather let us commit our reputation to the Lord, as a part of the sacrifice we laid at his feet when we surrendered all in obedience to the "call" to run the race for the great prize of our high calling. If thus we suffer some loss of reputation, by reason of our resolution not to neglect the King's business to fight for our own tinsel {that which is brilliant by worthless}, we may be sure that it will count with him as so much endured for Christ's sake; and so much the more will be our reward in heaven, when the battle is over and the victors are crowned.

Meantime, however, it behooves each of the Lord's people to be as circumspect as possible at every step of the way. Remember that in proportion to faithfulness and zeal in letting the light shine we will have the malignant opposition of our great Adversary, who seeks to turn and twist and maliciously distort and dis-color our every word and act;--because the accuser of the brethren can find no real charges; and because he is exceeding mad against the humble servants of the truth, as he was against the Chief Servant--our Lord. He, let us remember, was crucified as a law-breaker, at the instance of the prominent ones of the church, and betrayed to them by one of his own disciples.

"Consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds" when attacked by the Adversary,--whoever may be his agents and whatever their missiles. He cannot harm but will only increase our reputation in the Lord's sight, if we endure faithfully; and he can do no outward harm that God cannot overrule for the good of his cause--though that good may sometimes mean "siftings" of chaff and tares from the wheat.

V. Evil speaking, backbiting and slandering are strictly forbidden to God's people, as wholly contrary to his

spirit of love--even if the evil thing be true. As a preventive of anything of the nature of slander, the Scriptures very carefully mark out one only way of redress of grievances, in Matthew 18: 15-17.

Even advanced Christians seem to be utterly in ignorance of this divine ruling, and hence professed Christians are often the most pronounced scandal-mongers. Yet this is one of the few special, specific commandments given by our Lord; and considered in connection with the statement, Ye are my disciples if ye do whatever I command you, its constant violation proves that many are not far advanced in discipleship.

FOLLOW THE LORD'S WAY.

Let us look carefully at this rule, which, if followed, would prevent gossip, "evil-speaking," "backbiting."

Its first provision, for a conference between the principals alone, implies candor on the part of the accuser who thinks that he has suffered; and whom here we will call **A**. It implies his thinking no evil of the accused, whom we will style **B**. They meet as "brethren," each thinking his own course the right one, to discuss the matter; to see whether they can come to the same view. If they agree, all is well; the matter is settled; peace prevails; the threatened break has been averted, and no one is the wiser.

If they cannot agree, **A** may not start a scandal by relating his version;--not even to confidential friends may he disclose the matter, saying, "Don't mention it; and especially don't say I told you." No; the matter is still "between thee and him [**A** and **B**] alone." If **A** considers the matter important, so as to wish to prosecute the subject further, he has but one way open to him, namely, to ask two or three others to go with him to **B** and hear the case from both sides and give their judgment respecting its right and wrong sides. These should be chosen (1) as persons in whose Christian character and good sense and spirit of a sound mind **A** himself would have confidence, peradventure they should favor **B**'s view of the matter. (2) They should be chosen as with a view to **B**'s appreciation of their advice, if they should give their judgment of the matter in **A**'s favor.

It would, however, be wholly contrary to the spirit of justice as well as contrary to the spirit of the Master's instructions here, for **A** to "talk it over" with several friends from whom he desired to select these "two or three witnesses," to make sure that they favored his story (without hearing the other side) and would go to the conference prejudiced,--with their minds already determined against **B**. No; the matter is between **A** and **B** alone, until the two or three friends are brought in to hear both sides of the dispute in the presence of both parties.

TO ASSIST, NOT TO INJURE.

If the judgment of the "brethren" is against **B**, he should hear them, should accept their view of the mat-

ter as the just, reasonable one;--unless it involves some principle in which he cannot conscientiously acquiesce. If the "brethren" see the matter from **B**'s standpoint, **A** should conclude that in all probability he had erred; and, unless conscience hindered, should accept the position and apologize to **B** and the brethren for the annoyance caused by his poor judgment. But none of the parties are at liberty to turn scandal-mongers and tell the matter, "confidentially," to others.

If the decision went against **A**, and he still felt that he was injured and had failed to get justice through a poor choice of advisers, he might (without violence to the principles laid down by our Lord) call other advisers and proceed as before. If their decision were against him, or if he felt that he could not trust to the judgment of any, fearing that all would favor **B**, he should realize that part at least of his trouble is self-conceit, and would do well to fast and pray and study lines and principles of justice more carefully. But **A** has gained no right to tell anything to the Church nor to anyone, either publicly or privately. If he does so, it marks him at once as disobedient to the Lord and exercised by a bad spirit, a carnal spirit,--contrary to the spirit of the truth, the spirit of love.

If the committee decide partly against **B**, and only partly in favor of **A**, the brethren (**A** and **B**) should endeavor to see the matter thus, and to arrange matters amicably. In this case there would be nothing respecting the matter to tell;--nothing that is anybody's business.

If the committee decide wholly against **B** and wholly in favor of **A**, and if **B** will not heed them and make reparation for the wrong or cease from injuring **A**, the latter is still not at liberty to become a scandal-monger; nor are the brethren of the committee. If **A** considers the matter of sufficient importance to justify further action, there is just one course open to him: he with the committee may lay the matter before the Church. Then the Church shall hear the matter, both sides, and whichever (**A** or **B**) shall refuse to recognize the advice of the Church shall be thereafter considered and treated by all as an outsider--as not of the Church, not to be fellowshipped; as dead, until such time as he may repent and reform.

The duties of one member cannot be undertaken by another,--each must act for himself according to the Lord's rule. But if in violation of the Lord's command a matter become a scandal and be troubling the Church and disgracing it as a whole, then the properly chosen representatives of the company should take the matter up. They should not only investigate the principals in the difficulty, but with equal diligence they should investigate the real troublers who had circulated the scandal and should reprove them.

But all reproofs should be in love, remembering that all are imperfect in some particulars. The object in every case should be to correct not to punish. The Lord alone

has the authority to punish. At very most the Church may for a time withdraw fellowship with the unrepentant, and must as publicly restore it when repentance is manifest. Our love, joy, peace are the ends sought by the Lord, and these we must follow as his disciples. Any other course will surely work injury.

Thus did the Lord guard his true disciples from the insidious sin of slander, which leads onward to other and grosser works of the flesh and the devil, and stops growth in the truth and its spirit of love. And let us note, too, that those who hear slanders and thus encourage slanderers in their wrong course, are partakers of their evil deeds; guilty partners in the violation of the Master's commands. God's true people should refuse to listen to slanders and should point the offender to the Lord's Word and the only method therein authorized. "Are we wiser than God?" Experience teaches us that we cannot trust to our own judgments and are on safe ground only when following the voice of the Shepherd implicitly.

RATHER REPROVE THEM IN LOVE.

If any Brother or Sister begins to you an evil report of others, stop him at once, kindly, but firmly. "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather reprove them." Refuse to have any share in this violation of our Master's commands, which does great mischief in the Church. Supposing the Brother or Sister to be only a "babe" in spiritual matters, call attention to the Lord's ruling on the subject, Matt. 18:15, and 1 Tim. 5:19. If the conversation is not directed to you but merely in your hearing, promptly show your disapproval by withdrawing.

If, after having his attention called to the Lord's command on this subject, the slanderer still persists in "evil-speaking," "back-biting" and telling you his "evil surmisings," reprove him more sharply, saying as you go,--I cannot, must not hear you; for if I did, I would be as criminal in the matter as you are--violating the Lord's command. And even if I were to hear your story, I could not believe it; for the Christian who does not respect the Lord's Word and follow his plan of redress for grievances, shows so little of the Lord's spirit that his word can not be trusted. He who twists and dodges the Lord's words would not hesitate to twist and misrepresent the words and deeds of fellow-disciples. If to any extent you listen to such conversation or express "sympathy" with it or with the gossip or slanderer, you are a partner in the sin and in all its consequences; and if a "root of bitterness" is thus developed, you are more than likely to be one of those "defiled" by it.--Hebrews 12:15.

SLANDERERS ARE THIEVES.

A slanderer is a thief according to worldly standard: as Shakespeare wrote:

He who steals my purse steals trash;
But he who filches from me my good name
Takes that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.

According to the Christian standard, still higher, as voiced by the Great Teacher, slanderers are murderers. (See Matt. 5:22; 1 John 3:15, Revised Version.) Thus seen, the very suggestion to slander is to be shunned, as of the spirit of Satan.--Jno. 8:44.

VI. God's people should beware of pride as they would avoid the most deadly plague.

This rule, always good, and well backed by Scripture, seems doubly needful to those who are blessed with the light of present truth. This may seem strange: it may be reasoned that the receiving of so much grander views of God's character and plan would make his people feel the more insignificant and humble, the more dependent on divine goodness, the more trustful of God and the less trustful of themselves. And this should be the effect, always and ever: but alas, with very many it is not so.

Many get to feel that the knowledge of the plan of the ages proves them specially wise or great or good: they seem to forget that God hides the truth from the wise and great--that no flesh should glory in his sight. They love the truth selfishly, as dealers love their merchandise, for the sake of what they can get for it. If they cannot hope for wealth in exchange for the truth they can hope for small notoriety--to appear wiser than others, that they may dole it out in fragments and thus perpetuate their notoriety for wisdom, and gratify their pride or vanity. Such people do little to help circulate the present truth. If they cannot avoid it, they may mention MILLENNIAL DAWN or ZION'S WATCH TOWER or Tabernacle Shadows or Food for Thinking Christians or About Hell or About Spiritism; but when they do so it is usually with some disparaging remark; as for instance, that they "disagree in a good many things;" or that "they pin their faith to no man's coat sleeve, but go to the Word of God direct."

GRACE FOR THE HUMBLE.

Beware of all such people; sooner or later, unless they reform, they will fly the track entirely, and injure more than they ever helped. God does not wish such people to serve his cause, and will surely permit their vanity to stumble them,--however much their natural ability--and it is generally people of real or fancied ability who are thus afflicted with the spirit of pride and vanity. God opposeth the proud, but showeth his favor to the humble. We call every reader of our publications to witness that the author has never boasted of his wisdom or originality, either publicly or privately. We have boasted in the truth, and shall continue to boast of it--that no human philosophies can hold a candle to its brilliant electric ray; but we have never boasted of being its originator. On the contrary, it is because we did not manufacture it, but because God has revealed it "in due time" as "meat in due season," and because it is so much more wonderful than we or any other human being could originate or concoct, that we have confidence that none other than God is its Author and its Revealer.

If by the grace of God we have in any degree been used by him in serving present harvest truths to others, we rejoice in the service, and will continue to strive to be faithful to our stewardship: but as for vanity on this account, we see no room or reason for it. We are well aware that our Master could readily have found many others as fit and worthy of the service, and many more capable naturally: we can only suppose, therefore, that herein as previously--"God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of this world to confound the things that are mighty,...and the things that are despised...to bring to naught things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence."--1 Cor. 1:27-29.

We therefore caution all who by the grace of God have been translated out of darkness into God's marvelous light, that they walk proportionately the more humbly before the Lord: because, if the light received should become darkness, how great would be the darkness, and how hopeless the condition! It would, as the Apostle declares, be better for such never to have known the way of life. If salt lose its flavor it is good for nothing more than sand.

"BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART."

VII. Be pure: maintain a conscience void of offense toward God and men. Begin with the heart--the thoughts: harbor no thoughts that in any sense of the word would be evil. To make sure of this, have Christ Jesus as your pattern, well and much before your mind. When evil is obtruded {to force someone or something upon someone's attention unwarrantably} upon you, either from without or from within, lift your heart to him in prayer for the grace promised to help in every time of need. Keep constantly near you the thought and prayer, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer."

VIII. While treasuring and seeking to follow the various specific commands of Scripture, let us seek more and more to understand and come into sympathy with the principles which underlie the divine law: this will enable us to judge of the right and the wrong of such of our words, thoughts and acts as may not be particularly specified in the Lord's Word. Indeed, as we get to understand and sympathize with the principles of divine law, to that extent we are getting at the spirit of the divine Word.--See Psalm 119:97-105.

IX. Shun a contentious and fault-finding disposition as contrary to the spirit or disposition of Christ-- contrary to love.

A certain amount of combative courage is demanded in overcoming the world, the flesh and the devil and their various snares, and this fighting disposition may become a valuable aid to ourselves and the Master's cause if rightly and wisely directed;--against sin, first

in ourselves and secondly in others; if used for the Lord and his people, and against Satan and all his powers of darkness and superstition. This in the Scriptures is called fighting the good fight: and we all should be gallant soldiers in this battle for right and truth, lovingly defending our Captain's honor and his people's liberties.

FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT.

But such a good use of combativeness is not pleasing to the Prince of this world, and he will seek to pervert what he cannot directly use. Consequently he attempts with some to make combativeness appear a chief virtue: he encourages them to fight everything and everybody;--the brethren more than the powers of darkness;--nominal churchmen more than the errors and ignorance which blind them and make them such. Indeed his desire is to get us to "fight against God."

Let us be on guard on this point. Let us first of all judge ourselves lest we cast a stumbling block before others: let us fight down in our own hearts the wrong spirit which seeks to make mountains out of trifles and disposes us to be captious {faultfinding, critical; meant to entangle} and contentious over littles and nonessentials. "Greater is he that ruleth his own spirit than he that taketh a city." Let us guard ourselves that our defense of the truth be not from motives of self glorification; but from love for the truth, love for the Lord and love for his people, the brethren. If love be the impelling spirit or motive, it will show itself accordingly, in loving, gentle, patient, humble efforts toward the fellow-servants; and let us be "gentle toward all." Let "the sword of the spirit, the Word of God," which is quick and powerful, do all the cutting.

X. Beware of all thoughts, feelings and conditions directly or remotely connected with malice, envy, strife, hatred. Give these no place in your heart even for a moment; for they will surely do you great injury, aside from leading to the injury of others. Keep your heart, your will, your intentions and desires full of love toward God and all his creatures,--the most fervent toward God, and proportionately toward all who have his spirit and walk in his directed way.

XI. Do not trust your conscience. If it were a sufficient guide you would have no need of the Scriptures. The majority of people have as good as no conscience; for they are blind to the principles and laws of God given to guide conscience. And still worse off than these are those mentioned in 1 Timothy 4:2. Hence the imperative necessity for carefully heeding the Lord's Word, and walking circumspectly according to its light.

XII. Do not be bold, except for the right, the truth. So far as yourself is concerned preserve a reverential fear--of sin, and of displeasing the Master, and of losing the great reward--"the prize of our high calling." Nearly all who "fall away" first lose all fear and become self-confident. They forget that it is only "If ye do

these things ye shall never fall." (2 Peter 1:5-10.) "Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it." (Hebrews 4:1.) Partly because of the loss of this proper fear, "It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance." Δ

Provided by the Northwest Indiana Bible Students
Hebron, IN

WWW.Blessedbible.com