

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 PETER 3:8-15.

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Finally, be ye all like-minded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tender-hearted, humble-minded: not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling; but contrariwise blessing; for hereunto were ye called, that ye should inherit a blessing. 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. For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, And his ears unto their supplication: But the face of the Lord is upon them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be zealous of that which is good? But even if ye should suffer for righteousness' sake, blessed are ye: and fear not their fear, neither be troubled; but sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord.

EXHORTATION TO THE FRUITS OF FAITH

1. Here you have enumerated again a long list of eminently good works enjoined upon Christians who believe and have confessed their faith in the Gospel. By such fruits is faith to be manifest. Peter classifies these works according to the obligations of Christians to each other, and their obligations to enemies and persecutors.

2. Immediately preceding the text, Paul has been instructing concerning the domestic relations of husband and wife; how they should live together as Christians in love and companionship, giving due honor and patiently and reasonably bearing with each other. Now he extends the exhortation to Christians in general, enjoining them to live together in Christian love, like brothers and sisters of a household. In the rehearsal of many preeminently noble virtues and works, he portrays the ideal church, beautiful in its outward adornment, in the grace wherewith it shines before men. With such virtues the Church pleases and honors God, while angels behold with joy and delight. And what earthly thing is more desirable to man's sight? What happier and more pleasing society may he seek than the company of those who manifest a unity of heart, mind and will; brotherly love, meekness, kindness and patience, even toward enemies? Surely, no man is too depraved to command such goodness and to desire companionship among people of this class.

3. The first virtue is one frequently mentioned by the apostles. Paul, for instance, in Romans 12:16, says: "Be of the same mind one toward another." Also in Ephesians 4:3: "Giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Harmony is the imperative virtue for the Christian Church. Before the other virtues – love, meekness – can be manifest, there must first be concord and unity of heart among all. It is impossible that outward circumstances of human life be always the same; much dissimilarity in person, station, and occupation is inevitable. To this very unlikeness and to the natural depravity of flesh and blood is due the discord and disagreement of men in this world. Let one become conscious of personal superiority in point of uprightness, learning, skill or natural ability, or let him become aware of his loftier station in life, and he immediately grows self-complacent, thinks himself better than his fellows, demands honor and recognition from all men, is unwilling to yield to or serve an inferior and thinks himself entitled to such right and privilege because of his superiority and virtue.

4. Pride is the common vice of the world, and the devil fosters it among his numerous followers thereby causing every sort of misery and unhappiness, corrupting all ranks and stations, and rendering men vicious, depraved and incapable of executing good. In opposition to this vice the apostles diligently admonish Christians to be of one mind, regardless of station or occupation, since every individual must remain in the position to which he has been ordained and called of God. All ranks and stations cannot be one. Particularly is this true in the Church; for in addition to the outward difference of person, station, and so on, there are manifold divine gifts unequally distributed and varyingly imparted. Yet these many dissimilarities, both spiritual and secular, are to be amenable to the unity of the spirit, as Paul calls it, or a spiritual unity. Just as the members of the physical body have different offices and perform different functions, no one member being able to do the work of the other, and yet all are in the unity of one bodily life; so also Christians, whatever the dissimilarity of language, office and gift among them, must live, increase and be preserved in unity and harmony of mind, as in one body.

5. This matter of harmony is the first and most necessary commandment enjoined by the doctrine of faith; ay, this virtue is the first fruit which faith is to effect among Christians, who are called in one faith and baptism. It is to be the beginning of their Christian love. For true faith necessarily creates in all believers the spirit that reasons: *“We are all called by one Word, one baptism and Holy Spirit, to the same salvation; we are alike heirs of the grace and the blessings of God. Although one has more and greater gifts than another, he is not on that account better before God. By grace alone, without any merit of ours, we are pleasing to God. Before him none can boast of himself.”*

6. How can I think myself better than another by reason of my person or my gifts, rank or office? Or what more than I has another to boast of before God concerning himself? No one has a different baptism or sacrament, a different Christ, from mine, or grace and salvation other than I have. And no individual can have another faith than have Christians in general, nor does he hear any other Gospel or receive a different absolution, be he lord or servant, noble or ignoble, poor or rich, young or old, Italian or German. When one imagines himself different from or better than his fellows, desiring to exalt and glorify himself above others, he is truly no longer a Christian; because he is no longer in that unity of mind and faith essential to Christians. Christ with his grace is always the same, and cannot be divided or apportioned within himself.

7. Not without reason did the beloved apostles urge this point. They clearly saw how much depends upon it, and what evil and harm result from disregard of the commandment. Where this commandment is dishonored, schisms and factions will necessarily arise to corrupt pure doctrine and faith, and the devil will sow his seed, which afterwards can be eradicated only with difficulty. When once self-conceit rules, and one, pretending more learning, wisdom, goodness and holiness than his fellows, begins to despise others and to draw men to himself, away from the unity of mind which makes us one in Christ, and when he desires the first praise and commendation for his own doctrine and works, his own preaching, then the harm is already done; faith is overthrown and the Church is rent. When unity becomes division, certainly two sects cannot both be the true Church. If one is godly, the other must be the devil's own. On the other hand, so long as unity of faith and oneness of mind survives, the true Church of God abides, notwithstanding there may be some weakness in other points. Of this fact the devil is well aware; hence his hostility to Christian unity. His chief effort is to destroy harmony. “Having that to contend with,” he tells himself, *“my task will be a hard and wearisome one.”*

8. Therefore, Christians should be all the more careful to cherish the virtue of harmony, both in the Church and in secular government. In each instance there is of necessity much inequality. God would have such dissimilarity balanced by love and unity of mind. Let everyone be content, then, with what God has given or ordained for him, and let him take pleasure in another's gifts, knowing that in eternal blessings he is equally rich, having the same God and Christ, the same grace and salvation; and that although his standing before

God may differ from that of his fellows, he is nevertheless in no way inferior to them, nor is anyone for the same reason at all better than or superior to himself.

9. In temporal affairs, every inequality in the world can be harmonized by a unity of mind and heart. In relations other than spiritual there is mutual love and friendship. How great the outward dissimilarity between man and wife – in person, nature and employment! likewise between masters and their subjects. Yet, in mutual conscientiousness they mutually agree and are well satisfied with each other. So it would be possible to enjoy life upon earth in peace and happiness were it not that the devil cannot suffer it. He must divide hearts and alienate love, allowing no one to take pleasure in another. He who is illustrious, of noble birth, or has power or riches, feels bound to despise others as silly geese or witless ducks.

SYMPATHY A CHRISTIAN VIRTUE

10. The other virtues enjoined by Peter are easily recognized – “Compassionate, loving as brethren, tenderhearted, and humbleminded” [Luther translates “friendly” – courteous]. These particularly teach that Christians should esteem one another. God has subjected them all to love and has united them, with the design that they shall be of one heart and soul, and each care for the other as for himself. Peter’s exhortation was especially called for at that time, when Christians were terribly persecuted. Here a pastor, there a citizen, was thrown into prison, driven from wife, child, house and home, and finally executed. Such things happen even now, and may become yet more frequent considering that unfortunate people are harassed by tyrants, or led away by the Turks, and Christians are thus dispersed in exile here and there. Wherever by his Word and faith God has gathered a church, and that spiritual unity, the bond of Christianity, exists in any measure, there the devil has no peace. If he cannot effect the destruction of that church by factiousness, he furiously persecutes it. Then it is that body, life and everything we have must be jeopardized – put to the stake – for the sake of the Church.

11. Christians, according to Peter, should, in the bond of a common heart and mind, sympathetically share the troubles and sufferings of their brethren in the faith, whoever and wherever the brethren may be. They are to enter into such distresses as if themselves suffering, and are to reason: *“Behold, these suffer for the sake of my precious faith, and standing at the front, are exposed to the devil, while I have peace. It does not become me to rejoice in my security and to manifest my pleasure. For what befalls my dear brethren affects me, and my blessings are the cause of their misfortune. I must participate in their suffering as my own.”* According to the admonition of Hebrews 13:3: *“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; that is, as if in the same bonds and distress. Remember them that are illtreated, as being yourselves also in the body;”* as members of the same body.

12. We are all bound to one another, just as in the body one member is bound to another. As you know by your own physical experience, “Whether one member suffereth, all the

members suffer with it; or one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it,” as Paul says in Corinthians 12:26. Note how, when a foot is trodden upon or a finger pinched, the whole body is affected: eyes twitch, nose is contorted, mouth cries out – all the members are ready to rescue and help. No one member can forsake the others. In reality not the foot or the finger is injured, but the whole body suffers the accident. On the other hand, benefit received by one member is pleasing to all, and the whole body rejoices with it. Now the same principle should hold in the Church, because it likewise is one body of many members with one mind and heart. Such unity naturally entails the participation by each individual in the good and evil of every other one.

13. This virtue of sympathy, resulting as it does from a unity of mind and faith, is impossible to the world. In the world every man looks only upon what benefits himself and regards not how others, especially the godly, fare. Indeed, the world is capable of scornful smiles and extreme pleasure at sight of Christians in poverty and distress, and in their sufferings it can give them vinegar and gall to drink. But you who claim to be a Christian, should know it is yours to share the sufferings of your brethren and to prove your heartfelt sympathy with them. If you cannot do more, at least show it with comforting words or prayer. Their suffering concerns you as well as themselves, and you must expect the same afflictions from the devil and the wicked world.

OF LOVE

“Loving as brethren.”

14. This virtue must prevail among Christians everywhere. They are to manifest toward one another the love and faithfulness of brothers according to the flesh. It is a law of nature that brothers have a peculiar confidence in one another, being of the same blood and flesh and having a common inheritance. Particularly is this true when in distress. Although they may not be united in other respects, yet when stranger blood assails and necessity comes, they of the same flesh and blood will take one another’s part, uniting person, property and honor.

15. Likewise Christians should exercise a peculiar brotherly love and faithfulness toward one another, as having one Father in heaven and one inheritance, and in the bond of Christianity being of one faith, united in heart and mind. None may despise another. Them among us who are still weak, frail and eccentric in faith and morals, we are to treat with gentleness, kindness and patience. They must be exhorted, comforted, strengthened. We should do by them as do the brothers and sisters of a household toward the member who is weak or frail or in need. Indeed we cannot otherwise dwell in peace. If we are to live together we must bear with one another much weakness, trouble and inconvenience; for we cannot all be equally strong in faith and courage and have equal gifts and possessions. There is none without his own numerous weaknesses and faults, which he would have others tolerate.

OF MERCY

“Tenderhearted, humbleminded” [friendly].

16. Here Peter has in mind mankind in general – friends and enemies, Christians and persecutors. Owing to original sin, man is naturally disposed to seek revenge, especially upon those who injure him without cause. If he can do no more, he at least maliciously invokes evil upon his enemy and rejoices in his misfortune. Now, Christians more than any others in this world are innocently persecuted, injured, oppressed and aggrieved, even by those having the name and honor of Christians, a thing of frequent occurrence today. God’s people are aggrieved by such treatment, and if the natural instinct of flesh and blood could have its way, they would gladly revenge themselves; just as they of the world mutually exercise their revenge, not content until passion is cooled.

17. But a Christian should not, and indeed consistently he cannot, be unmerciful and vindictive, for he has become a child of God, whose mercy he has accepted and therein continues to live. He cannot seek pleasure in injury to his neighbor or enjoy his misfortune. He cannot maintain a bitter or hard and stubborn heart toward him. Rather he is disposed to show mercy even to his hostile neighbor, and to pity his blindness and misery; for he recognizes that neighbor as under God’s wrath and hastening to everlasting ruin and condemnation. Thus the Christian is already more than revenged on his enemy. Therefore he should be friendly towards the hostile neighbor and do him every kindness he will permit, in an effort to lead him to repentance.

18. Yet, in showing mercy, as frequently enjoined heretofore we are not to interfere with just and ordained punishments. God’s Word does not teach us to demand mercy or commend kindness where sin and evil practices call for punishment, as the world would have us believe when their sins merit rebuke, particularly the vices of those in high places. These transgressors claim that when reprov’d their honor is assailed and occasion is given for contempt of their office and authority, and for rebellion, a thing not to be tolerated. This is not true. The lesson teaches the duty of each individual toward all other individuals, not toward the God-ordained office. Office and person must be clearly distinguished. The officer or ruler in his official capacity is a different man from what he is as John or Frederick. The apostle or preacher differs from the individual Peter or Paul. The preacher has not his office by virtue of his own personality; he represents it in God’s stead. Now, if any person be unjustly persecuted, slandered and cursed, I ought to and will say: *“Thank God;”* for in God I am richly rewarded for it. But if one dishonors my baptism or sacrament, or the Word God has commanded me to speak, and so opposes not me but himself, then it is my duty not to be silent nor merciful and friendly, but to use my God-ordained office to admonish, threaten and rebuke, with all earnestness, both in season and out of season – as Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:2 – those who err in doctrine or faith or who do not amend their lives; and this regardless of who they are or how it pleases them.

19. But the censured may say: “Nevertheless you publicly impugn my honor; you give me a bad reputation.” I answer: Why do you not complain to him who committed the office to

me? My honor is likewise dear to me, but the honor of my office must be more sacred still. If I am silent where I ought to rebuke, I sully my own honor, which I should maintain before God in the proper execution of my office; hence I with you deserve to be hanged in mid-day, to the utter extinguishment of my honor and yours. No, the Gospel does not give you authority to say the preacher shall not, by the Word of God, tell you of your sin and shame. What does God care for the honor you seek from the world when you defy his Word with it? To the world you may seem to defend your honor with God and a good conscience, but in reality you have nothing to boast of before God but your shame. This very fact you must confess if you would retain your honor before him; you must place his honor above that of all creatures. The highest distinction you can achieve for yourself is that of honoring God's Word and suffering rebuke.

20. *“Yes, but still you attack the office to which I am appointed.”* No, dear brother, our office is not assailed when I and you are reminded of our failure to do right, to conduct the office as we should. But the Word of God rebukes us for dishonoring that divinely ordained appointment and abusing it in violation of his commandment. Therefore you cannot call me to account for reproving you. However, were I not a pastor or preacher, and had I no authority to rebuke you, then it would be my duty and my pleasure to leave your honor and that of every other man unscathed. But if I am to fill a divine office and to represent not my own but God's dignity, then for your own sake I must not and will not be silent. If you do wrong, and disgrace and dishonor come upon you, blame yourself. *“Thy blood shall be upon thine own head,”* says Scripture, 1 Kings 2:37. Certainly when a judge sentences a thief to the gallows, that man's honor is impugned. Who robs you of your honor but yourself, by your own theft, your contempt of God, disobedience, murder, and so on? God must give you what you deserve. If you consider it a disgrace to be punished, then consider it also no honor to rob, steal, practice usury and do public wrong; you disgrace yourself by dishonoring God's commandment.

21. This much by way of reminder of the difference between official rebuke and personal anger and revenge. It must constantly be kept before us because of the artfulness of flesh and blood, which ever seeks to disregard that difference. True, God would have all men to be merciful and friendly, to forgive and not to avenge wrong; but the office, which is ordained for the punishment of the wicked, will not always admit of that course. Few are willing to forgive, and therefore God must enforce his government over the merciless. They must be punished without mercy. This divine principle must not be restricted. Neither must it be applied beyond measure. Every official must be careful not to exceed the demands of his office, exercising his own revenge, his own envy and hatred, in the name and under pretense of that position.

22. Peter continues to expatiate upon this topic – the good works he has been discussing: gentleness, mercy, friendliness – citing beautiful passages of Scripture and using other exhortations – to incite Christians to practice these virtues. He says: *“Not rendering evil for*

evil, or reviling for reviling; but contrariwise blessing: for hereunto were ye called, that ye should inherit a blessing.”

23. We have now seen whose prerogative it is to avenge, rebuke and punish evil. This passage does not refer to official duty. When the judge declares sentence of execution upon a thief we have truly an instance of vengeance and reproach, and a public and extreme reflection upon honor. But it is God’s judgment and his doing, with which we are not here concerned. The Christian of true faith and innocent life, who confesses his doctrine and belief, and as he is commanded rebukes opposing forces, will provoke the devil and the world, and will be persecuted, oppressed and harassed in the name of office and right, even by individuals whose official duty it is to protect the godly and restrain unjust power. If these cannot do more, they will at least annoy, hinder and oppose that Christian as far as possible. If the Christian be quick-tempered and fail to curb his anger and impatience, he will effect no good. He will only bring upon himself that disquiet of heart which consumes and worries itself with thoughts of revenge and retaliation upon the offender; which when the devil perceives, he rejoices. He so urges and instigates as to cause more mischief on both sides. Thus he doubly injures the Christian – through his enemy and through the anger wherewith the Christian torments himself and spoils his own peace.

OF PATIENCE

24. What then shall we do, you say, when we must suffer such abuse and without redress? The only resource, Peter says, is to possess your heart in patience and commit the matter to God. This is all that remains when they whose duty it is will not help you, nor restrain and punish the wrong, but even do you violence themselves. If the evil receive not judicial punishment, let it go unpunished until God looks into it. Only see that you keep a quiet conscience and a loving heart, not allowing yourself, on account of the devil and wicked men, to be disturbed and deprived of your good conscience, your peaceful heart and your God-given blessing. But if in your official capacity you are commanded to punish the evil, or if you can obtain protection and justice from rightful authorities, avail yourself of these privileges without anger, hatred or bitterness, ay, with a heart that prompts to give good for evil and blessing for reviling.

25. Such conduct is becoming you as Christians, the apostle says, for you are a people called to inherit a blessing. Oh, wonderful and glorious fact, that God has decreed and appropriated to you this blessing whereby all the riches of his grace and everything good are yours! and that he will abundantly give you his Spirit to remain with you, blessing body and soul, if only you hold fast his grace and do not allow yourselves to be deprived of it. What price would you not gladly pay for this blessing, were it purchasable, instead of being freely given, without your merits, and were you privileged thus to buy the assurance of having a God so gracious, one willing to bless you in time and eternity? Who would not willingly give even body and life, or joyfully undergo all suffering to have the perfect assurance of heart which says: “I know I am a child of God, who has received me into his grace and I live

in the sure hope that I will be eternally blessed and saved.” Think, Peter says, what a vast difference God makes between you and others because you are Christians. He has appointed you to be heirs of everlasting grace and blessing and of eternal life. But they who are not Christians – what have they but a terrible sentence like a weight about their necks? the sentence pronouncing them children of the curse and of eternal condemnation.

26. If men would take this to heart, it would be easy by teaching and persuasion to win them to friendship and kindness toward their fellow-men; to induce them not to return evil or reviling from motive of revenge, but when their own privileges and protection and the punishment of evil cannot be obtained, quietly and peaceably to suffer injury rather than lose their eternal comfort and joy. Christians have excellent reason, a powerful motive, for being patient and not revengeful or bitter in the fact that they are so richly blessed of God and given that great glory whereof, as Peter afterwards remarks, they cannot be deprived, nor can they suffer its loss, if only they abide in it. The apostle emphasizes this fact and further persuades Christians by citing the beautiful passage in Psalm 34:12-16:

“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. For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears unto their supplication: but the face of the Lord is upon them that do evil.”

27. These words the Holy Spirit uttered long ago through the prophet David, for the instruction and admonition of all saints and children of God. David presents to us the matter as he daily saw it in his own life and learned from his own experience, and as he gathered from examples of the dear fathers from the beginning of the world. “Come hither, dear children,” he would say, “if you will be taught and advised, I will give you sound instruction as to how we are to fear God and become his children. Who desires peace and comfort?” “Oh, who would not desire peace and comfort?” cries the world. For these everyone seeks and strives, and all the efforts of the world are directed toward this end.

THE CHRISTIAN’S PEACE

28. There are two ways to the goal of peace. One is that chosen by the world. The world seeks to obtain peace by preserving its own with violence. It desires the death of all who oppose it and will suffer injury or evil in word or deed from no one. This method, it is true, is appointed to govern mental authority. It is the duty of civil rulers to faithfully employ it to arrest and hinder evil as far as possible. But they can never wholly restrain evil nor punish every offense. Much wickedness will remain, particularly secret evil, which must punish itself, either by repentance here or in hell hereafter. By this procedure Christians will not accomplish for themselves any personal advantage; the world is too wicked and it will not give them support.

29. Therefore, if you desire peace for yourself personally, particularly as a Christian, you must choose another way. The Psalm shows it to you when it says: “Refrain thy tongue from

evil, and thy lips that they speak no guile.” This injunction really applies to doctrine, meaning that we are to abide by the true Word of God and not to allow ourselves to be seduced by false teaching. But Peter here extends the application to the outward life and conduct of Christians in the work, the circumstances being such as to call for this admonition in the matter of refraining the tongue. On account of the faith and confession for which men are called Christians, they must suffer much; they are endangered, hated, persecuted, oppressed and harassed by the whole world. Christ foretold (Matthew 10:22): “Ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake.” Easily, then, Christians, might believe they have cause to return evil, and being still flesh and blood mortals, they are inevitably moved to be angry and to curse, or to forsake their confession and doctrine and with unbelievers to join the false church with its idolatrous teaching. Here the Psalm admonishes: Dear Christian, let not all this move you to rave, curse, blaspheme and revile again, but abide in the blessing prepared for you to inherit; for you will not by violence remedy matters or obtain any help. The world will remain as it is, and will continue to hate and persecute the godly and believing. Of what use is it for you to hate, chafe and curse against its attitude? You only disturb your own heart with bitterness, and deprive yourself thereby of the priceless blessing bestowed upon you.

30. We have the same teaching in the fourth verse of Psalm 4, which comforts saints and strengthens them against the temptation and provocation to anger and impatience which they must experience in the world. “Be ye angry,” David says, “and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.” That is, although according to the nature of flesh and blood you fret because you are compelled to witness the prosperity of the world in its ungodly life and wickedness, and how it spites, despises and persecutes you with pride and insolence, nevertheless let not yourselves be easily provoked; let wrong, displeasure, vexation and worry remain outside the inner life; let them affect only the outward life, body and possessions. By no means let them become rooted in your heart. Still your hearts and content yourselves, and regard all this vexation as not worth losing sleep over. If you desire to serve God truly and to render acceptable sacrifice to him, then with faith in his Word place your hope in him as your dear Father who cares for you, hears you and will wondrously support you.

GUARDING THE LIPS

31. But the psalmist’s additional words, “Refrain your lips that they speak no guile,” refer, as I have said, primarily to confession of the doctrine; but there is another thought: When one is prompted to anger and to complaint about injury and wrong, in his impatience and irritation he cannot speak fairly concerning the matter of offense, but invariably exaggerates. So it is with anger and retaliation. One receiving but a pin-point wound will fly into a passion and be ready to break the offender’s head. The individual that suffers a single adverse word immediately proceeds to abuse and slander in the extreme his opponent. In short, an angry heart knows no moderation and cannot equally repay, but must make of a splinter, even a mote, a great beam, or must fan a tiny spark into a volcano of flame, by

retaliating with reviling and cursing. Yet it will not admit that it does wrong. It would, if possible, actually murder the offender, thus committing a greater wrong than it has suffered.

32. So wicked and unjust is human nature that when offended it stops not with equal measure in retribution; it goes beyond and in its anger and revenge spares neither the neighbor's honor nor his body and life. James 1:20 says: "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God"; that is, it suffers not a man to abide in his faith and good conscience. But official indignation, which is God's wrath, does not so. It seeks not the destruction of man, but only the punishment of the actual fault. Man's anger and revenge, so wicked and insatiable are they, return ten blows for one, or even double that number, and repay a single abusive word with a hundred.

33. So Peter admonishes you to restrain your tongues, to curb them, lest they suddenly escape your control and sin with wicked words, doing injury double that you have received. Guard your lips that your mouth utter not guile or falsehood through your anger, and that it may not calumniate, abuse and slander your neighbor contrary to truth and justice and in violation of the eighth commandment. Such conduct is, before God and man, unbecoming a Christian and leads to that most disgraceful vice of slander, which God supremely hates. It is the devil's own, whence he has his name of liar or slanderer – diabolus, or devil.

GOOD WORKS

34. The Psalm says further: "Turn away from evil and do good"; that is, beware lest on account of the wickedness of another you also become wicked, for anger and revenge meditate only harm and wickedness. Therefore be all the more diligent to do good, if you can, that your heart may retain its honor and joy and that you may abide in righteousness, and not fall from God's grace and from obedience to him into the service of the devil. By anger and revenge the devil tempts you, endeavoring to get you again into his toils and to embitter your heart and conscience until you shall exceed others in sin.

35. "*Seek peace and pursue it,*" continues the apostle. This is a sublime exhortation, and faithful, divine counsel. You must not think, Peter would say, that peace will run after you, or that the world – much less the devil – will bring it into your house. Rather you will find the very opposite true. From without strife will be carried to you in bales, and within your own heart will be kindled anger and bitterness to fill you with everlasting disquiet. Therefore if you desire peace, wait not until other people help you to obtain it, nor until you create it for yourself by force and revenge. Begin with yourself. Turn from the evil to the good. Even undergo suffering to provide your heart with the peace which endures in spite of all that would rob you of it. Strive ever to keep your heart firm in the resolve: I will not be angry nor seek revenge, but will commit my affairs to God and to those whose duty it is to punish evil and wrongdoing. As for my enemy, may God convert and enlighten him. And however much more of violence and wrong I may suffer, I will not allow my heart to be robbed of its peace.

36. Notice, the way to preserve peace and to see good days even in evil times is to keep a silent tongue and a quiet heart through the comfort of divine grace and blessing. No outward occasion may be given for strife, but always peace is to be sought with good words, works and prayers. We must even pursue peace, follow after it, with genuine and strong suffering. Thus we preserve it by force. In no other way can a Christian see good days and hold fast his blessing. Remember you must make strenuous effort if you would not reject your blessing nor be influenced by another to carelessly lie and otherwise sin with your tongue. Flesh and blood are weak and sluggish in the matter of preserving peace, therefore Peter strengthens his exhortation and further encourages us by the promise of God's help and protection for the faithful and his punishment of their enemies. He says:

“For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears unto their supplication.”

37. Inscribe this verse upon your heart in firm faith and see if it does not bring you peace and blessings. Try to believe that God sits above, sleepless and with his vigilant eye ever upon you. With watchful vision he beholds the righteous as they suffer violence and wrong. Why will you complain and become discouraged by reason of the harm and grief you experience, when the gracious eyes of the true Judge and God are upon you and his intent is to help you? All the wealth of the world would I give, if I might, to purchase that watchful care, or rather to obtain the requisite faith; for surely the lack is not in his regarding, but in our faith.

GOD OVER ALL

38. More than this, God's ears, the apostle tells us, are also open to the prayers of the righteous. As he looks upon you with gracious, winning eyes, so also are his ears alert to even the faintest sound. He hears your complaint, your sighing and prayer, and hears, too, willingly and with pleasure; as soon as you open your mouth, your prayer is heard and answered.

39. Again, Peter says: “The face of the Lord is upon them that do evil.” True, God's eyes are upon the righteous, but nevertheless he sees also the others. In this case he beholds not with a friendly look or gracious countenance, but with a displeased and wrathful face. When a man is angry the forehead frowns, the nostrils dilate and the eyes flash. Such a manifestation of anger are we to understand by the Scripture when it refers here to *“the face of the Lord.”* *On the other hand it illustrates the pleased and gracious aspect of God by “the eyes of the Lord.”*

40. Now, why is “the face of the Lord” upon evil-doers and what is its effect? Certainly God's purpose is not to heed or to help them, to bestow blessing or success upon their evil-doing. His purpose is, according to the succeeding words in the psalm, “to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.” This is a terrible, an appalling sentence, before which

a heart may well be prostrated as from a thunderbolt. And ungodly hearts would be thus appalled were they not so hardened as to despise God's Word.

41. Notwithstanding the indifference of the wicked, the sentence is passed. Verily it is no jest with God. It illustrates how sincerely he cares for the righteous and how he will avenge them on the wicked, toward whom his countenance bespeaks punishment in due time and the cutting off of their memory from the earth. In contrast, the righteous, because they have feared God and abode in their piety though suffering for it, shall, even here upon earth, live to see blessing and prosperity upon their children's children. Although for a time the company of the wicked conduct themselves with pride upon the earth, and imagine themselves secure beyond the possibility of being unseated, nevertheless when their hour comes they are suddenly hurled down from earth into the abyss of hell and must suffer the righteous to remain in possession of the earth. So testifies Christ in Matthew 5:5, and Psalm 37 more fully explains the matter.

42. It is proven by all the examples of Scripture and also by the experience of the whole world from the beginning, that God casts down those who seek only to injure. They who have despised God's threats and angry countenance with security and defiance have at last experienced the fulfillment of these warnings and perished thereby. King Saul thought to destroy godly David, to exterminate his root and branch and blot out his name as if he had been a rebellious, accursed man. But God effected the very opposite. Because David in his sufferings and persecution walked in the fear of God and trusted him with simplicity, desiring no harm to his enemy, God's gracious eye was ever upon him and preserved him from that enemy. On the other hand, the angry face of God was bent upon King Saul, and before David was aware of it the king had fallen, and his whole family met ruin with him; they were obliged to surrender crown and kingdom to the persecuted David.

43. Christians should strengthen their faith with the comforting thought that God's gracious countenance is over them and he turns eye and ear toward them; and that on the other hand he looks with angry face upon their enemies and those seeking to injure, and will take a hand in their game, obliging them either to refrain from their evil-doing, or to perish by it. Such retribution is certain. No one can live long without proving by his own experience and that of other men the truth of the proverb, "Right will assert itself." However, we lack in faith and cannot wait God's hour. We think he delays too long and that we suffer too much. But in reality his time will come speedily, and we can well wait and endure if we believe in God, who but grants our enemies a brief opportunity to be converted. But their appointed hour is already at hand and they will not escape if it overtakes them without repentance.

"And who is he that will harm you, if ye be zealous of that which is good? But even if ye should suffer for righteousness' sake, blessed are ye."

44. According to Peter's words here, you have a very great advantage over all your enemies, whoever they be, in being richly endowed by God with eternal blessing. You know he will protect, support and avenge you, hence you abide in your faith and godliness. Although your

adversaries think to trouble and harm you, they can do you no real injury whatever they effect. For wherein can persecution harm if you strive for godliness and abide in it? Not by malice, might and violence can your enemies take from you, or diminish, your piety and God's grace, his help and blessing. And even from all the bodily and temporal harm they can inflict, you suffer no loss. For the more they seek to injure you, the more they hasten their own punishment and destruction, and the greater is your recompense from God. By the very fact that they slander, disgrace, persecute and trouble you, they multiply your blessing with God and further your cause, for God must the sooner consider your case, supporting you and overthrowing them. They but prepare your reward and benefit by their wicked, venomous hatred, their envy, anger and fury. At the same time they effect for themselves conditions the very reverse. Being condemned by their own evil consciences, they cannot in their hearts enjoy one good day, one peaceful hour; and they heap up for themselves God's wrath and punishment.

45. Indeed, you are all the more blessed, temporally and eternally, Peter declares, for the very reason that you suffer for righteousness' sake. You are so to regard the situation and to praise and thank God for your suffering. The apostle looks upon tribulation in this light and exalts it as supreme blessedness and a glorious thing. Christ says in Matthew 5:11-12: "Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven." Oh, your adversaries should purchase a little of this comfort regardless of cost and boast of suffering a little for the sake of righteousness! Could they understand the promise and be worthy of it, how intensely might they desire to have suffered all and much more than they thought to inflict upon you, if only they might be blessed and prove the comfort of this precious, divine promise!

"Fear not their fear, neither be troubled; but sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord."

46. Here again Peter resorts to Scripture and cites a verse from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 8:12-13) where he admonishes God's people not to be terror-stricken by the wrath and threats of men, but firmly and confidently to trust in God. The prophet speaks similarly in Isaiah 51:7: "Fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye dismayed at their revilings." As if he would say: Why will you permit yourselves to be disturbed by the persecutions of men, however great, mighty and terrible enemies they may be, when you are blessed and happy in God to the extent that all creatures must pronounce you blessed? Moreover, you know the eyes of your God behold you and his ears are open to your cry, and whatever you desire and pray for is heard and granted. More than this, your adversaries are threatened by his angry face. What are all men – tyrants, pope, Turk, Tartars, ay, the devil himself – compared to this Lord, and what can they do against him, when and wheresoever he chooses to show his power? They are but as a straw to a mighty thunderbolt which makes the earth tremble. Therefore, if you are indeed Christians and believe in God you ought in no wise to fear all these adversaries, but rather, joyfully and with scornful courage to despise their defiance, their threatening and rage, as something utterly harmless to you; they are but effecting their own destruction in hurling themselves at the Majesty before which all creatures must tremble.

TRUST IN GOD ENJOINED

47. But this you are to do: Sanctify God; that is, regard and honor him as holy. This is nothing else than to believe his Word; be confident that in God you have truly one who, if you suffer for righteousness' sake, neither forgets nor forsakes, but graciously looks upon you and purposes to give his support and to revenge you on your enemies. Such faith and confession honors him as the true God, upon whom man can confidently and joyfully call for help, reposing his whole trust in him upon the authority of his sure Word and promise, which cannot deceive or fail.

48. In contrast, unbelievers cannot sanctify God; they cannot render him due honor, although they may talk much of him and display much divine worship. They do not accept God's Word as the truth, but always remain in doubt. In the hour of suffering they deem themselves utterly forgotten and forsaken by the Lord. Therefore they murmur and fret, being very impatient and disobedient toward God. They rashly seek to protect and revenge themselves by their own power. That very conduct betrays them as beings without a God, as blind, miserable, condemned heathen. Such are the great multitude of Turks, Jews, Papists and unbelieving saints today throughout the world.

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