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Underneath are the Everlasting Arms

(Convention Address)

“The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee.”—Deut. 33:27.

WHAT wonderful consolations for the saints of God are to be found in the Bible, that “Boon most sacred from the Lord.” And how very appropriate and beautiful is the Apostle’s reference to our God and Father, as “The God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulations.” (2 Cor. 1:3, 4.)

To that “great cloud of witnesses” tested and approved in former ages, God was faithful in giving all needed comfort and consolation, to the end that they should not be discouraged in their desire to merit His favor. The stern requirements of the Law, with its inevitable condemnation, did not make up the sum of Divine revelation even in those days before “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” To Patriarchs and Prophets, and to all who were “Israelites indeed,” this word of comforting assurance was spoken—“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy ; I dwell in the high and holy place, and with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” (Isa. 57:15.)

The warmth of His love, His comforting considerations, therefore, could not be hidden entirely from view behind the inflexible demand of a law which said, “This do and thou shalt live.” His character is such that He must and would remember that even those who delighted in His law and trembled at His unalterable Word, were but dust, incapable of perfect goodness, because evil was so painfully present with them. As we are privileged to know Him today revealed in Christ, so He has always been in character, the same unchangeable God.

The fuller revelation that came with the light of the Gospel, wherein Jesus revealed that “God is love,” was marvellously anticipated in those oft-repeated assurances of that fact given to those men and women of other ages “of whom the world was not worthy,” and who, notwithstanding the utter impossibility of gaining life through the law, “had this testimony that they pleased God.” Thus it is that we find, scattered like guiding stars above their pathway, constant reiterations of this love given to faithful Ancient Worthies long before the Gospel’s “exceeding great and precious promises” shed their rays of light upon the path of the Church. To those humble and contrite ones God gave ample assurance that in all their trials and difficulties He was near with His grace to sustain and His comfort to cheer.

When *servants* of God’s household enjoyed such assurances of His abiding presence and protection as was given to this “great cloud of witnesses,” how very near then should He seem to the *sons* of His family

now. If to servants He would say, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you," what tender consolations He must speak to His own spirit.. begotten children. If to obedient, loyal servants encouragement was given in the knowledge that "The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the Everlasting Arms," what measures of protection and grace will be the present portion of the dear children of His love. Of these it is written, "that the least . . . will be greater"

(in relationship and station) than the very greatest and most honored of all the prophets. For these, His sons, "some better thing" has been reserved in all God's appointments, embracing present privileges and future rewards. Surely then such favored children must be encouraged as they hear this "voice behind" them speaking in tones of amplified assurance, testifying to the faithfulness of God toward all who love Him. Plainly this voice must give strength as they hear it directing them in the way that they should walk, and additionally, establishing their faith in the promised grace sufficient for every time of need; yea, that God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." (Eph. 3:20.) Well indeed has the poet drawn attention to the foundation of our confidence in God:

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word! What more can He say than to you He hath said ? You, who unto Jesus for refuge have fled."

And what more can He say than to us He has said? Could He say more than He has said in giving us so many "exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be made partakers of the Divine nature ?"—promises which meet our every experience and need, and promises which can never be broken, for they are the promises of One who cannot lie. These precious pledges of God, how dependable they are ! Behind us lie long centuries of His care over His people, and the testimony of all such who have preceded us comes floating down with the faith-inspiring assurance that "there hath not failed one word of all His good promises." (1 Kings 8:56.) Six thousand years of unfailing faithfulness through every possible emergency that could serve to test it—and He has been all this to His people, though none of them have been wholly perfect in their faithfulness to Him—no, not one of them. What more indeed can He say to us then, than we have in these promises—'Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.' (Heb. 6:17, 18.) Who then, or what power, "shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Rom. 8:35, 37.) "The Eternal God is our refuge; and underneath are the Everlasting Arms."

It may well thrill our hearts to recall the love of Christ for His church collectively, and to remember that all the saints composing that Body are His peculiar charge, for we love to share this joy with all who join with us in love for Him. But He wants us to realise a more intimate and personal place in that special care He exercises over His own. "He calleth His own sheep by name." This is the Picture Jesus gives us of the shepherd's intimacy which He has established with the sheep who are all His own. What can He mean by this illustration if it be not to teach us that each one of us may enjoy so close and personal a relationship as this? Beyond question He is "a good shepherd," and by God's appointment He is the "great Shepherd of the sheep"; but more precious still, and best of all, is the fact that each one of the true sheep may say, "The Lord is my Shepherd." "He is mine, and I am His forever." His love is an individualizing love, and His attentions are blessedly individual and personal too. The attention I individually need is in no danger of being overlooked in His care for all. By His rod and staff I personally am both comforted and corrected. He is my very faithful Shepherd when He leads me beside the quiet waters and into the green pastures, and He is just as faithful and loving when He lays the rod to my back when my feet wander out of the way, or when I follow other voices than His. O how short would have been my enjoyment of those quiet waters and verdant pastures if He had not been a Shepherd of whom I could say, "He restoreth my soul," or as a better rendering gives it, "He restores me when wandering." Prone as we are to wander,

none but He could be a Shepherd equal to our needs.

Thus again we are reminded of those Everlasting Arms of God's provision for us—they are always underneath— underneath our need of a “faithful and merciful High Priest,” faithful to commend when we have done well, and faithful to chastise, and to scourge, if need be, “every son whom the Father receiveth.” Acknowledging, then, our need of discipline lest we run to wood-making rather than fruitbearing, and confessing our repeated failures to be wholly obedient to Him, we cannot but love Him for giving us the corrections we so much need, and especially so when we know that all the while those Everlasting Arms are underneath us. We could not be otherwise than grateful, for “We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness.” (Heb. 12:9, 10.) Underneath all our weaknesses, strong to bear up, loving and wise to chastise and scourge us, constant and unwearied to keep us from being castaways, are the Everlasting Arms. Therefore, “Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him.”—Heb. 12:5.

“Faithful, O Lord, Thy mercies are,
A Rock that cannot move,
A thousand promises declare
Thy constancy of love.”

And how great is His mercy and compassion! What pains He has taken to make it clear that He is “touched with a feeling of our infirmities.” If in contrition of heart we are constantly humiliated by our failure and chagrined by the fact that we might well confess ourselves “the chief of sinners,” what then? O to grace what a debtor we are made!

Just when it would seem that there is ground for assured defeat and failure, we discover anew that “The eternal God is thy refuge; and underneath are the Everlasting Arms.” He has anticipated our well-nigh abandoned hope of being continued in His love. He therefore does not come to us and add to our discouragement by saying, What man of you having an hundred sheep, if *one of the best and most faithful of them* wanders away, will he not go out and search for it until he find it? Ah no, our need is to have One “who can have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way,” and such He has assured us He is. No matter how weak and frail we are, if the heart be true, He “abideth -filthful-, and for us He tells it thus: “What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them (any *one* of them) doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. . . . Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.” (Luke 15:4, 5, 7.) Truly “the goodness of God leadeth to repentance” and the knowledge of the Everlasting Arms underneath constrains our hearts to more watchful diligence, lest we grieve the patient love of God.

But even if we have not wandered so far afield as this, but seem to have remained within the fold, heeding not the voice of strangers, and zealously intent on obeying the Shepherd's voice, even then how constantly we are made to realise with increasing clearness the debt of love we owe. Dwelling here where faith may rest in the completeness of His provision for us, what joy there is in remembering that though knowing us as we really are, He loves us just the same. Ah yes, He sees and knows us as we really want to be. No one knows better than He that in attempting to live, we are often spoiling our own work by incongruous temper, or incongruous conduct. We misrepresent ourselves oftener than others misrepresent us. It is our foibles, our own blemishes of temper, our own false steps, which help to make our lives an enigma to others. It is with our own foolish hand the interrogation point is often dashed in after life's most earnest utterance. These are tremendous discouragements, silencing discouragements. They sometimes shake courage to its foundations; they fill the heart with bitterness and agitation; they scatter

the tender uprisings of holy purpose, and throw us back in confusion and sorrow. We feel that others doubt us, look askance at us, point at us behind our backs, or smile with skepticism over our confession of faith in Jesus Christ and our vows of discipleship. And the sting of this bitterness is in the thought that we are discrediting a deeper selfhood which, beneath these variabilities of temper, these inconsistencies of speech and conduct, these futile attempts at self-expression, is after all the greatest and truest part of us. We know that we are sound at the core; we know that when, through all the shadows of fault and deficiency, Christ's great question, "Lovest thou Me?" searches down into our depths, there is that which gives back the unfaltering answer "Yes". But can we demonstrate this love so that it will be believed? Can we find anywhere a basis for a new beginning in which our confidence, shaken by failure and misunderstanding, can once more lift itself up into joy? Blessed is he who realises in such an hour that he still has left love's last and greatest refuge, Christ's knowledge of our sincerity; "Thou knowest that I love thee." Whatever our own poor, faulty words and ways may say to others, awakening in their minds doubts of my sincerity; whatever the verdicts of others may be concerning me; whatever my own memory holds up before me of inconsistency and error — "Thou knowest that I love Thee."

And in every new experience, in every new temptation, in hours of strength, in hours of contrition, still we say to Him those same words of the deeper, holier fellowship, "Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee."

"Thou knowest, not alone as Lord, all knowing;
As man, our mortal weakness Thou hast proved;
On earth, with purest sympathies o'erflowing,
O Saviour, Thou has wept and Thou hast loved;
And love and sorrow still to Thee may come,
And find a hiding-place, a rest, a home."

"Thou knowest that I love Thee." It speaks to us of Christ's knowledge of our better selves. Day by day we struggle to explain ourselves, to live intelligibly, to utter the best that is in us. In vain! short successes alternate with swift failures. The very words and deeds by which we would explain ourselves become in our faulty hands like masks and disguises. The unreality of living grows insupportable. Sometimes it seems as if lives were simply stumbling against one another in the dark, so few understand us, so few do we understand. We appear at our worst in perverse hours when we would have shown our best; we talk commonplaces when we would have spoken the very secrets of God; we grieve the life we sought to cheer. We weep with vexation over days that are mere comedies of errors, or deserts of dullness. The eternal, the glorious relief from all this is Christ's knowledge of our better self. Jesus knows. He sees the glorious purpose which by some flash of temper or by some maladroit words we nullified this very morning. He realises and accepts the heaven-soaring prayer which potentially filled our spirit when, under the drowning surge of weariness, we could pant forth but one ejaculation. He measures the celestial ideal of living, which, like a city of gold, flashes continually before our ambition, and fails continually before our blundering life. He knows us not only as we are, but as we mean to be.

"All I could never be,
All men ignored in me
This I was worth to God,
Whose hand the pitcher shaped."

My beloved Master, "Thou knowest all things." All power in heaven and in earth has been given to Thee. Thou knowest the great secrets of the Father's purposes. To Thee it has been given to know all the contents of the scroll within and without. But of all Thy boundless knowledge this only gives me courage to come to Thee, and offer Thee this day my faulty life :-0 blessed Saviour, "Thou knowest that I love Thee." Here then is the saint's rest, for here our faith may drop its anchor in the calm sure haven of the

comforting assurance that “The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the Everlasting Arms.”

With such immutable promises to cheer us on our way, how earnestly we should seek to emulate the spirit of David, and vow with him that “Now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me ; therefore will I offer in His tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord.” (Psa. 27:66.) This, we remember, was to be the result of having those Everlasting Arms underneath us. “He shall thrust out the enemy from before thee.” Truly the Lord has “compassed us about with songs of deliverance” (Psa. 32:7), and these should be heard from our lips, filling His courts with praise. “Who-so offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving, glorifieth Me, and prepareth a way that I may show him the salvation of God.” (Psa. 50:23, R.V. margin.)

This was the experience of Paul and Silas when their songs of deliverance were sung while as yet their feet were fast in the stocks. Their songs made possible a defeat of the enemy that could never have been accomplished for them if they had failed in their faith in the power of God. This also was the experience of Israel in one of their memorable battles with the enemy, as recorded in 2 Chron. 20. King Jehoshaphat had received word of an invasion that at first looked like sure and terrible destruction, a great multitude from beyond the sea. But on going to the Lord in prayer, and confessing, “We have no might against this great company . . . but our eyes are upon Thee,” confidence was quickly established. On the morrow they went forth to battle, but how? “He (Jehoshaphat) appointed singers unto the Lord that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, *Praise the Lord; for His mercy endureth for ever.* And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, which were come against Judah. . . . And they were three days in gathering of the spoil it was so much.” They had more than victory over an enemy driven out before them, they had riches and jewels “more than they could carry away”.

There are two songs connected with this battle, one of praise inspired by faith in the presence and power of God when face to face with seeming defeat, the other a song of thanksgiving after the victory had been gained, in acknowledgement of the faithfulness of the One in whom they had trusted. Both of these songs should be in our experience also. Songs in the night are gloriously possible to faithful saints—songs of praise and thanksgiving. Confidence, singing its assurance of victory through Christ, will drive away the enemies of doubt and fear. We, too, will have our triumphant song by and by in the valley of Berachah (blessing), glorifying God for His faithfulness to us, but it is more precious just now, to know that we are singing the first song—praising God, yes, and seeing Him set His ambushments against the enemy, and driving him out. Shall we not have both songs in our completed experience? We will indeed if we constantly remember in the house of our present pilgrimage, that “The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the Everlasting Arms”.

“O, for a life of worship!
O, for a life of praise!
Would that this glorious Vision
Might linger all the days!
Would that we might behold Him,
Forgetting all beside
In Him—the Best—the Highest,
For ever satisfied!
Would that this little earth-life-
The little lights between,
No longer held our spirits,
And God alone were seen.
If such a Light, unclouded,
Might shine before our gaze,
O, who could fail to worship ?
O, who could cease to praise?

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In the Last Days.

In recent months Australia has experienced most amazing spectacles in connection with the appearance of four young men entertainers from England. It was hard to believe the news reports of happenings in other lands in connection with these entertainers, but when similar behavior in our cities is brought to notice, it must be admitted that a really serious situation exists for a great number of young people today.

A report on the happenings in Adelaide is as follows :—"Adelaide has been in the throes of the current Beatlemania. It is really a form of mass hysteria; really idolatry, inspired by the Arch Enemy of mankind. This thing is being engineered by Big Business to make profit out of human weakness. It is having a very serious effect upon young people, mainly upon young teenage females. They become hysterical and irresponsible, just in the same way as the savage tribes in so-called heathen lands. They get caught up in the rhythm and excitement just like in the native dances and corroborees, etc. Adelaide has been a seething mass of bewildered, shouting, screaming and often hysterical young girls for two days and nights. It is all very unsettling and injurious, and a matter of grave concern to all who have the well-being of young people at heart. It pervades and permeates everywhere. These young men are just being used as tools in the hands of those in high places to make profit out of those who are misled and exploited by them. No wonder James says—'Woe to you rich men' (chapter 5). How subtle are Satan's deceptions. How we need the help of Heavenly grace and wisdom; how we long for the binding, of Satan, and for the wholesome, healing and upbuilding influences of Christ's Kingdom."

It would seem that these happenings are prompted by modern living and fashions in recent years, such as the mode of dress now in evidence amongst young people and some not so young. Not many years ago young and older women adhered strictly to the mode of dress that clearly distinguished them, and rightly so, from the opposite sex. Now, a great number of young and older females take a pride, apparently, in appearing in clothes very similar to males, and this seems to create a desire with some to act as males, stirring up themselves and others to do things that are often immodest and vulgar. Again it is a matter of money; business people are quick to produce any unusual form of dress that will appeal to people who like to attract attention, etc.

The Lord's strict instructions to Israel could well be taken as a guide to Christians generally and especially Christian parents today, as recorded in Deut. 22:5—"The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment ; for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God."

Partaking of the Fruits and Laboring

“The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits.” 2 Tim. 2:6.

It is a very significant fact to all who search the Scriptures that very rarely does the truth lie on the surface. Because this is many give up Bible reading altogether. No beauty is found between the covers of the Sacred Book very often, just because the reader expects the unfolding as simply as reading a novel. We must read carefully and thoughtfully, and above everything else with prayer to God that He, through the spirit, may shed light upon our searching.

If we were looking at the above text on the surface only we might say, “Oh, well, it simply means that the man who does the work is entitled to the first share in the dividends, or to his wages ; or that the farmer who ploughs, sows and reams is entitled to the first portion of the cron.” There is a sense in which this may be so, but it does not appear to have been the Aristotle’s thought here, as evidenced by the following verse :—“Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.”

There is a deeper meaning if we can but grasp it. While many have taken the words to infer that before we can expect to receive the fruits or to be partaker of the fruits we must be prepared to labor, the Apostle’s thought seems to have been somewhat contrary—that before we can labor effectively, we must be first partaker of the fruits.

We all know that in the varied experiences of our earthly course, if we find someone in trouble or distress of any kind, that we can help far more effectively, and are always more readily sympathetic, if we have passed through some similar experience ourselves. So it seems that the Apostle Paul is trying to show us that before we can become effective laborers in God’s vineyard we must be first partakers of the fruits.

What is the fruit of which we must be partakers? We have the answer surely in Gal. 5:22, 23. “The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” We are told that against all such there is no law. There can be no doubt that this is the fruit to which our Lord Himself referred in John 15:8, “Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples.”

We shall not make a detailed study of the ninefold fruit of the spirit, for at this time we are concerned only as to how we can be partakers of it. There is but one way of receiving this fruit of the spirit and that is by Him who said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” Some even dare to think they can partake of the fruits otherwise. They realize that to be patient, humble, unselfish, kind, pure, etc., are good and right but they trust in their own strength to obtain or partake of them. As one writer has put it—“Some—are ready to doff the cap to Christ but unwilling to bow the knee.” We find that the Apostle is warning against such in this same passage—in the preceding verse—“If a man strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned except he strive lawfully.”

In the realm of sport, etc., we see men striving for masteries, striving it is true for a corruptible crown, but even such a crown is not won unless the competitors strive lawfully. There are rules and regulations always to be observed. If these rules are not adhered to, the race or game ends not in a crown but disqualification. It behoves us each one to see then, that striving for the crown, “incorruptible and that fadeth not away,” we do not presume to stand before our God without the wedding garment of our Lord’s imputed righteousness, and without taking His yoke upon us and learning of His meekness and lowliness of heart. It is in this way that we become partakers of the fruits of the spirit, the fruits which we must partake of first, before we can hope to be used of the Lord in imparting them to others. The laboring husbandmen need the testimony of the Samaritans (John 4:39-42). We believe, not because of another’s saying, but we have heard Him ourselves. We are partakers of the fruit of His Gospel, and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the World.

Evil-doers and Busybodies

“But let none of you suffer as . . . an evil-doer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters.” 1 Peter 4:15.

ASSUREDLY none of the Lord’s people could willingly be evil-doers. He who would wilfully do evil would not have the Lord’s spirit, but that of the Adversary. Such being the case, the worst that could be said against any of the truly consecrated surely would be that he had been overtaken in a fault, or that he had some weakness of the flesh, or that by the snare of the Adversary he had been led into doing something which his heart disapproved. But evil deeds, even though unintentional, are to be guarded against carefully. “Let none of you suffer as an evil-doer”—not one—at any time—under any circumstances.

But now we come to the second part of the Apostle’s warning—busybodying. The saints seem as liable as others to become busybodies and to suffer for so doing. We have sometimes thought that the Lord’s consecrated people are more inclined to be busybodies than are others. They have higher standards than others. Their love of righteousness is greater than before, and their hatred of iniquity is greater. There is contumaciously a temptation, therefore, not to be content with minding one’s own business, but to advise and to seek to regulate everybody and everything.

Of course there is a duty devolving upon every parent to enquire more or less into the affairs of his children, or of those in any manner under his direct care, for whom he is responsible. But even in this he should seek to recognize individual rights and privacies, and not allow his sense of duty and responsibility to impel him to probe into every little matter. A certain reasonable amount of responsibility should be thrown upon children, and they should have a general idea of what is expected of them. They should be required to measure up to that standard unless something positively indicates to the contrary. The spirit of busybodying is condemned by the Apostle, and all of God’s people should be on guard against it.

It would appear that busybodying is a fruitful source of difficulty in the church—in all ecclesias. A clear knowledge of present truth seems rather to increase this difficulty. As in families a wrong feeling often obtains, which impels each member to want to know all about the affairs of every other member, so in the church there is also a tendency to meddle, to inquire about, to interfere in the matters of others—to busybody. In some cases there seems to be a disposition to try to hunt up everything connected with each other, and to sit in judgment upon each other.

The difficulty is a lack of love. “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour.” It rejoices not to find flaws ; it seeks not for them. It surmises no evil—rather it surmises good. Let each of the Lord’s people judge himself in this matter and see to what extent he has been a busybody in the affairs of others. Let each decide in his own case that the fault, in proportion as he has it, is a lack of the spirit of love, and let each in that proportion go to the Lord prayerfully, earnestly seeking to be built up in the quality of love.

Well do we know that he who loves not a brother whom he has seen has no assurance that he really loves God whom he has not seen. We may safely conclude that there is something of the gall of bitterness in the heart, if we take pleasure in seeking flaws in the flesh of members of the body of Christ. Their flesh, justified by the Redeemer and consecrated, becomes His flesh. Whoever, therefore, is a fault-finder and busybody in the affairs of the brethren is doing this against the flesh of Jesus. “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” Acts 9:5; 22:8.

Ensnared by the Adversary

Our confidence in the brethren is such that we cannot believe that any of them would willingly and intentionally, or of preference, take the loveless course of injury. Our thought is that the Adversary is on

the alert to ensnare God's people and to develop in them the spirit of busybodying and lovelessness, under the guise of duty, love of righteousness, justice, etc. They overlook the fact that God neither authorized us to judge one another, nor to exact justice from one another. He neither authorized His people to chastise each other, nor to punish each other in any manner. He has never authorized His people to become inquisitors, investigators, busybodies.

On the contrary, He has told us "to judge nothing before the time," and that He will attend to this matter. Is it not written, "The Lord will judge His people"? Are we afraid that He is incompetent? Shall we attempt to be wiser than He? Shall we take into our own hands matters which He said that we should leave in His hands? If we do so, we shall be sure to get ourselves into difficulty, and perhaps get others into difficulty as well.

Whoever busybodies will suffer. It may be that the victim also will suffer and that many will be defiled, but we may be sure that the busybodies themselves will not escape. The punishment of the busybody in part no doubt will be the rupture of his own relationship with God—the loss of his own peace and joy and fellowship with the holy spirit. This will be his reward for busybodying.

If a brother and a sister in the church seem to have difficulty, mind your own business, and allow them to settle the matter between themselves. If they are related as parents and children, let them adjust the matter by themselves, and learn whatever lessons the Lord as their Judge and Teacher will give them. If they are husband and wife, the matter is the same. Let them alone. Do not busybody. Even if one of them should come to you and ask advice, be slow to give it—decline to hear the case—follow the Lord's counsel. Advise the one who complains that the Lord has given instructions and that it is not your province to interfere—that Matt. 18:15-17 directs the course to be pursued.

See that you have nothing to do with such a case unless it come to you directly in line with this arrangement which the Lord has provided. Otherwise you are busybodying and will make trouble for yourselves and for others. If called into the family mix-up, rather regret the necessity than be eager to nose into their affairs. Advise them first in the best way you know how, to adjust matters between themselves, reminding them of the words of Jesus, "That which God hath joined together let no man put asunder," and then see that you do nothing to put them asunder or to help to complete the separation of spirit which already has started.

Remember that as the Lord's representative you have no authority whatever to be in the least a disturber, but are commissioned only to be a peacemaker. When you are called in, in such a case, try to be just, fair, reasonable, in full accord with the Golden Rule in every word that you shall utter. Those who may hope to be entrusted with the judgment of the world in the future (1 Cor. 6:2) must qualify now by a development of a high sense of mercy and love, as well as of justice.

Busybodying an Evidence of Pride

But, says one, is it not a part of our duty to help keep the church pure? And in order to do so, should we not be on the alert? If, therefore, we see a husband and a wife, or a brother or a sister, or parents and children out of accord, are we not in duty bound to pry into their affairs, in order to see if we cannot set them straight?

That is exactly the busybody's spirit. We are mentioning it because *a* great many of the Lord's dear people who mean the very best do not know what busybodying is while they are doing it. Mind your own affairs! If you get too busy watching others, the Adversary will take advantage of you. So long as the outward conduct of any brother or sister is reasonable and fair, justice and love both say that you should not meddle with them, in the sense of trying to mind their business. Content yourself with setting them a

good example of meekness, faith, patience, brotherly-love. Then if they ever need advice, they may voluntarily come to you. And then will be your time to show your moderation and to give them advice as an oracle of God, in harmony with Matt. 18:15-17—and nothing more.

But says another, does not St. Paul criticise the church at Corinth because they had in their midst one who had grievously sinned? And did he not upbraid the church for their failure to judge and rid themselves of such a person? Quite true. But that was a case of open, wilful, acknowledged sin, disgraceful to the individual and to all with whom he associated. And so it should be today. If anyone lives in open sin, and acknowledges it, and boasts of it, the case should be promptly taken note of by the church along the lines of Matt. 18:15-18. If the erring one still continues in a wrong attitude, in open sin, the final step should be his or her complete separation from the church. Until he or she has made a complete reform, such should be thoroughly disowned by the church.

Surely such cases are rare among the Lord's people, and equally rare should be the procedure which the Apostle suggests for such a case. The Apostle is not suggesting inquisition into the past lives of all those who constitute the church of Christ. On the contrary, in one of his epistles he intimates that he knew full well that many who were of the church had at one time been quite disreputable characters. He says, "And Much were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of our Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God." 1 Cor. 6:11.

It is a wholly mistaken idea that any of us is commissioned to set everybody else right. It betokens a great deal of pride to have such an impression. If some brother and sister do not harmonize very well, let them alone. If they think it best not to be very intimate, let them alone. If they are married, and believe it to be to their best interests to live separate, let them alone—mind your own business. If there is some secret fault, let them alone. "God will judge His people." You have no business to meddle with it, unless He gives you some further commission than we find in the Scriptures. (Reprints-5274).

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