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DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

BY Elder Walter Cash

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DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

FIRST STUDY.

"My little children of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you."--Gal. 4: 19.

The Galatians did not need to be born again. They had received the Spirit by the hearing of faith, and Jesus had been set forth among them as the only way of salvation. Paul was anxious in soul that they should go on to attain to the stature of men in Christ. So he with soul burdened for them prayed that "Christ might be formed in them." This was evidently that they should be more like Christ in character, in mind, in heart, in affections, in all things that should make up the life of those who are born again. It is not salvation by works, but the bringing forth of fruit.

Salvation is by grace. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works lest any man should boast."--Eph. 2: 8, 9.

While the above is the ground of having condemnation set aside, and of reaching heaven, yet there is a great work before each one who entertains this hope, and that is development of Christian character, that God may be glorified, and that the life here on earth may have a helpful influence in the world even as a candle set in a candlestick to give light to others, and as salt which has not lost its savor, and so become worthless and to be cast out. And, too, that one may not lose the "joy of salvation."

There is such a wonderful instruction given in the twelfth chapter of Romans on the development of Christian character that I have it in mind to take it up and make four lessons of three verses each, beginning with the ninth verse.

Verse 9. "Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good."

Of course, it is to be understood that the love here referred to is the love that pertains to the kingdom of God. God is love; they who are born of God are born of love, and this love for God and godly things, and for others who are born of God, is an evidence upon which faith and hope may rest that we are born of God.

So, there is to be no manufacturing of this love, under consideration, in the heart, but the proper development and use of the love that is from above, and is heavenly in its origin. The love from heaven is pure, and begets confidence and fellowship. The very first manifestation of this love forms a basis of confidence that the individual giving evidence of it is born of God, and so long as this love is shown in the acts and language, that confidence remains unshaken, and brotherly love grows stronger and stronger. From this fact arises the exhortation to "let brotherly love continue."

If we fail to act true to the character of this love, it is disloyalty to God, and has a bad effect on the reputation of the individual, loosening his hold upon the confidence of the children of God. The exhortation in the text is to be true to this love. It is a love for heavenly things, things which belong to Christ's kingdom--his service, his church, the declaration of the gospel, the fellowship of saints, a hope of heaven and delight in the truth.

Sometimes, those who have this love planted in their heart profess to know nothing about it, and to still be in love with the world. This is dissimulation, and has the effect of weakening hope in the individual. It has a contrary effect on the character to being true to the implanted love.

This love is as pure and simple as the love of a child, and any glossing it over is dissimulation, too. It is not to be exhibited in unfelt expressions of endearment. When such professions are heard it has a repulsive effect, and makes us feel that it is "put on"; and we wonder if there is any real heart feeling there on the subject of religion and Christian fellowship.

So, in the development of Christian character we must, first and all the time, live true to the nature of the fountain from which the stream of love flows in simplicity and directness, neither trying to hide it nor parade it. It is ingratitude to hide it, and robs us of a joy and blessing that is above all earthly bliss. It is such a relief to the soul to just confess it to those we love, that we may feel free to drink in the comfort that this love gives us.

It is a human, fleshly motive, lacking in deep reverence for divine things, to profess more than emanates from the deep, sweet well of love in the soul, and is like standing on holy ground in unhallowed shoes. We should not so much "profess" out love for divine things as to "confess" it in devotion and faithful service through trials and afflictions, sunshine and shadow, on through life and down to death. "Be thou faithful unto death," and the promise is, "I will give thee a crown of life."

I have written this much in regard to the first clause of our long lesson, because nothing will be right if we are wrong on this point. Christian character, to approach the Bible standard, must be built upon the foundation of God's love in the soul, and the building must conform to the foundation. Church membership, soul fellowship, acceptable service, and honorable life before men in the world, can only beget confidence and show forth that there is light in the soul, and that it originates in the love which is shed abroad in the soul and then goes out in simple purity.

"Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." Here we have the affirmative and negative sides, essential to a Christian character, which we are to study and strive to follow. The evil in the world is anything, the nature and effect of which is, to break down and defeat the ends to be attained by Christian life. Evil is not limited to awful crimes that all persons with moral sensitiveness shudder at and condemn, but is such an

insidious influence as to require close scrutiny to guard against it. The word translated "abhor" is a very strong word, meaning to be afraid of as well as to reject with repugnance. Such are all things of which Satan is the author. They are not only detestable in themselves, considered from the high viewpoint of true Christian character, but their alluring and destructive influence on human beings should make them to be feared. A constant watch needs to be kept lest they separate one from the good, and so rob him of the blessing and joy that a Christian character yields. From this fact emphasis is thrown upon the exhortation to "cleave to that which is good", and to hold it so closely as to prevent the entering in of any destructive influence that would prevent the "forming of Christ" in the life.

What is denominated "good" is to be determined by a careful study of God's word. All traits of character that are approved by the divine standard are certainly good in the sight of God. Also, all acts which are either commanded or commended are to be understood as embraced in the good things which Christians are to cleave to. This word, "cleave", is a strong term, as well as the word "abhor." It is taken from a word that means, to be glued to. This gives the idea of the adherence to the good is to actually be as a part of the character; not simply an approval in word, but a real soul attachment.

In deciding what we are to abhor, we are brought to consider what would come between us and the good as set forth in the Bible, and to be so attached to the "good and acceptable will of God" as to fear and detest what would separate us from it. Whatsoever renders us lukewarm in our devotion to God, indifferent to his service, and cold to the church and God's people, is to be abhorred for it will detract from our Christian character in the estimation of others and rob us of the joy and strength of living close to the Master.

Verse 10. "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another." Kindness is absolutely essential to a character that is to influence others for good. This is a general truth that applies to all persons, and cannot be emphasized too strongly in the building of Christian character, where there is need that nothing should break down that love which is the true basis of Christian activity. The moment an unkind act is seen it begins to break down confidence in the thought that one is moved by the love of God. So our affection is not to be in word only, but in kind acts. No one could think of a church being approved by the Master, in which all the members were unkind to each other. If this would be true as applied to a whole church, then it is certainly true as applied to the individual. Therefore, the apostle has written this so that it will embrace all the members, as much as to say, each to all the others.

Perhaps we see fault in some of the members, or they may not have treated us just as they should. Well, we are to be kindly affectioned to them with "brotherly love." How should brothers in the flesh treat each other? We all know

how ugly it looks for brothers in one family to treat each other unkindly. Brotherly love covers faults with the mantle of charity and does not parade them before others.

"Brotherly love" for Christ's sake should be more forgiving and considerate than in a fleshly relative. If it be a general rule to do good for evil, and to pray for persecutors, how strong the rule ought to be considered, to be kindly affectioned with brotherly love. We should cultivate a kindly disposition. Let it be seen in the countenance, heard in the tone of voice, and plainly expressed in the acts. Think how an unkind look or word pierces you and be on guard to keep from giving others pain in this manner.

The last clause of this verse is but an obvious application of what is taught in the first part. A kindly disposition and brotherly love will keep us from stepping in ahead of a brother and taking what rightly belongs to him, and so preferring ourselves in honor before others. It is more Christ-like to sacrifice for others than it is to be self-serving. So we must not forget when striving to build up a Christian character, that is, having Christ formed in us, that the good rule reads, "in honor preferring one another."

Verse 11. "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord." It may be thought of some that one can build up a Christian character and just live to one's self, but none of these scriptures will bear such interpretation. It is true that when alone, and in the silent watches of the night, our minds and hearts should go out to God in adoration and prayer, and if we are not thus conscious of the goodness of God, and are lacking in gratitude and thankfulness to him, there is slight hope that we shall exhibit a Christian character before men; but we could not feel right toward God and have no disposition to live a right life toward men.

In this rule of life, "not slothful in business," we have an application of this principle. We are to show by our attitude toward the rules of life and service our appreciation of God's mercy and our respect for His word.

Of course, this does not have reference to our worldly interests, though a slothful habit in these matters may show a disposition which will manifest itself in spiritual matters. Slothfulness is indifference to important matters, and a habit of putting off attendance to them. If we feel little importance is to be attached to the things that the members of a church should do, and have a disposition to put off doing them, we are slothful. We have all learned to admire and respect that member who is always prompt. If some one is sick, he drops his work and goes to see him while he can do some good. He does not wait until the sick get well and then drop in when it is convenient to say how sorry he is that they were so afflicted. If some one is in need, he ministers to their necessity; if in sorrow, he comforts them. He is not slothful about going to his church meetings, for he is told not to neglect that; he starts on time and then is wide awake to the interests of the church when he gets there. He does not let the business drag as

though the members had no interest in it. He does not let the moderator wait and wait for some one to make a motion; he makes it or seconds the one that is made. He is not putting himself forward--he is not slothful. What is required of us is our duty, and our duty is our business, and we should not be slothful about it.

"Fervent in spirit." This is the cure for slothfulness. Not to have a fervent spirit is to be lukewarm, and lukewarmness will show itself in slothfulness. An old expression has it that a fervent spirit is like a boiling pot, it is full of action. The last clause--"serving the Lord"--explains the thing had in view in the other two. We must not be slothful in serving the Lord, but we should be fervent in spirit in his service. We might turn this thought upon ourselves and ask how we measure up to this standard. Let us pray the Lord's help that we may not be found slothful and lukewarm, for then the things said of the unprofitable servant (Matt. 25: 26), "Thou wicked and slothful servant," will not apply to us.

We should remember that a low estimate on the importance of anything results in indifference toward it, and slothfulness in the performance of it. The business connected with our religion is the King's business; not just an ordinary king, but the business of the great King of kings. If we go about it as the slothful, it will be true of us as written in Proverbs. "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; and lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall was broken down." "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep; so shall thy poverty come as one that travelth, and thy want as an armed man."

What a curse slothfulness is to the church! The indifference of its members all join together to make a heavy load for the church.

Let us quicken our steps when a religious duty is before us, remembering what is said of the lukewarm spirit. Pray God for fervency of spirit in the service of God.

Any one by looking about him, can find examples of the fervent, whole-souled, active servants of God, and they may also see the slothful, cold and indifferent. A moment's thought will decide which is more in keeping with the instruction given in this eleventh verse. A little deeper thought will follow Jesus in his work, and Paul desired so much that the Galatians might be more like Christ in heart, and mind and life--have "Christ formed in them."

DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

SECOND STUDY.

Romans 12: 12-14. "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you; bless and curse not."

Here are traits of character that are essential to true Christian growth, to having Christ formed in the mind and life. These are not exhortations for some special occasion, and for which one might not have need except at long intervals. They are qualities which ought to become part and parcel of the being. This is a disposition to be worn throughout the year, beginning with January and holding true all the other months. Christian character should not be considered as a Sunday garment, that is to be put off at other times; it is for sunshine and clouds, for tempest and calm, sickness and health, and on through afflictions until death comes.

Verse 12. "Rejoicing in hope." Hope is one of the mainsprings of continuance. When the hope sinks low the strength wanes. To have energy and activity hope must be in lively exercise. Hope is expectation that has a joy connected with it. What we expect and dread we do not hope for. But the desire that can be embraced by hope is that which stimulates.

The children of Israel, after having been delivered from Egyptian bondage and brought safely across the Red Sea, had ground for hoping that God would help them through all their trials, and finally bring them safely into the promised land. This hope should have made them strong and willing to follow the God-given leader, but unbelief broke down the force of the evidence they had, so that they were crippled by fears instead of having courage through hope.

Every regenerated child of God has evidence that God has thought on him, and when he is brought to hope in his redemption it ought to mean so much to him that he would rejoice in it. It should be taken to signify to every one who has a hope that he is included in the purposes of God through Jesus, to be sustained and saved unto eternal life after death. It means that if God be for him there is none that can successfully be against him, and that he shall finally triumph over all trials and afflictions, and even death itself. It means that God hears his prayers, that Jesus is his intercessor as well; that the Holy Ghost has been sent to be his comforter, and that he shall come off more than conqueror through Christ Jesus.

He may be poor and afflicted in this life, but these "light afflictions" shall soon be with the things in the past, and he shall go home to rest. Not only so, but while he is passing through them he shall not be forsaken. The God that saved Daniel in the Lion's den is his God and has all power, now, as always in the past, and he will not forsake those who trust in him. If we call upon him in the day of trouble he will deliver, that is, he will deliver the mind and soul from the bondage, or the oppression, of the trouble.

What a wonderful hope is this! It is pointed out, in the words that we are considering, that we should so measure and properly value such a hope that we would rejoice in it. When the ark of the Lord was brought up to the city of David, David wrote a psalm to be sung in which he said, "Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord." He said in

Psalm 9: 14, "I will rejoice in thy salvation." Jesus told his disciples to rejoice that their names were written in heaven. Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice." And, too, he exhorted the Thessalonians, "Rejoice evermore."

Rejoicing is the privilege, and, it may be said, duty of the Christian. But he has trials, doubts and afflictions! How is he then to rejoice? Rejoice in hope. Paul, who had builded such a strong character in hoping, said he could even glory in tribulations, or rejoice in them. How was that? Well, because he considered that tribulations worked patience, and patience experience, and experience hope. So, it was the looking forward that enabled him to glory in tribulation, and this looking forward for good, is hope. That is what we are asked to consider, the growing into that frame of mind that no matter what comes we shall be so fortified in our trust in God, and hoping in him, that we shall rejoice that we are blessed with such a hope.

"Patient in tribulation." This is what grows out of "rejoicing in hope." He who can joy in his hope will have strength to endure tribulation. "For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." It will take more than human endurance to be patient in tribulations such as come into most lives, so the concluding thought in this twelfth verse is, "Continuing instant in prayer." So the joy of hope is not such a gladness as to make one forget his weakness, but is rather a leaning on the everlasting arm, and trusting in it, which will lead to constant going to the throne of grace. Patience will be manifested in a character such as this. The trinity in this verse forms a feature in Christian character that can but impress all who come to behold it, and its influence will be a strong recommendation that the possessor is a real follower of Jesus. The buoyancy and brightness of a hope that contemplates the promises of God as real facts, that endures without complaining, yielding not to despair, and manifests all the humility of one who is much at the feet of sovereign mercy, will do much to strengthen and encourage others.

Verse 13. "Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality." A hospitality that is formal, cold and unfelt will never impress others as coming from a Christian character. It may sometimes be seen in those who have been regenerated, but it is a fleshly growth and not a spiritual fruit. The "good Samaritan" showed the real spirit of hospitality, which is opening up the comforts you have so they may be shared by others. It is the disposition that feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, and gives water to the thirsty. This is the definition, really, to the first clause in this verse--"distributing to the necessity of saints." It is not the mere giving of material things, but the cultivation of a soil that will produce such fruit. The "necessity" of saints is not material things alone. They need the comfort and consolation that kind and encouraging words can give, and a kindly hand to direct them in the difficulties of life. Are we so selfish, and have so little

concern for others, that we cannot spare from what the Lord has blessed us with for their necessity? If so, there is something lacking in our character as a follower of Jesus, for he was not that way. He was always ready to respond to the cry that came from the needy, and the apostle said that he was anxious in soul until the Galatians had Christ formed in them. Of course, we need to have him formed in us as much as did the Galatians, and one trait of his character was always being ready to impart to others. When the poor woman touched his garment there went out from him for her necessity.

It is not following Christ to live our lives alone. Jesus came to minister and not to be ministered unto. If we follow him we shall find delight in ministering to the needs of others. If this spirit is formed in us we shall find it easy enough to share what we have with others. If the church is properly used it develops this spirit. The selfish person can never get the joy and blessing out of church membership that it should bring. He cannot get close enough to his brethren. He does not help to bear burdens which should be borne by all equally, according to individual ability. Let the necessity be what it may, we should be interested in it, and cultivate a willingness to lend a helping hand. We sometimes take the meaning of hospitality to be just receiving persons into our homes; but it means more. It means to have a kind and generous spirit which is back of the open door, and this can be manifested in many ways. We can welcome our brethren into our lives or we can shut them out.

Verse 14. "Bless them which persecute you; bless and curse not." We are so likely to put our personality before our religion. We do not consider the real Christian character of persons, but only whether they are well disposed toward us or not, then, form our opinion of them. There are many things to condemn in the world, things that are contrary to the teachings of God and the character of Jesus, but often we do not consider these things so much as we do matters which touch selfish interests. Many of the troubles in churches start over personal dislikes, and to gratify personal feelings other things are taken up to cover up the real feeling. We take up some little doctrinal difference, or perhaps a disciplinary question, and use these weapons to cover up malice in the heart.

The apostle lays down a higher line in life. If some one dislikes you without cause, or for Christ's sake, and attempts to destroy you or make you unhappy, stand high enough to do good for evil. It is crucifying to the flesh to take such a stand, but it is always safe to stand with Jesus, and dangerous to take a different road to the one he took. When his enemies put him to death, he prayed, "Father, forgive them." When Jesus and his disciples were refused bread, his disciples thought he should exercise his power and destroy those who treated them thus; but he rebuked them for this spirit. (Luke 9: 55.) When Christ was reviled he reviled not again. He drove out of the temple with a scourge those who were making it a house of merchandise, but when he suffered he threatened not, but

"committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." Paul told the Corinthians that his course was, that "being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it." This is in keeping with his instructions to the church at Rome.

The exhortation to bless would probably mean to do good and to pray for those who persecute you. Jesus taught to pray for them which despitefully use you, and said, "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

In the last clause of this verse Paul lays down the rule that embraces the first instruction. It is "Bless, and curse not." It is unbecoming poor mortals, who are so full of faults and weakness, to be cursing or wanting to destroy others. In Jesus' instructions as to the principles of prayer, he says that we may ask the Father to forgive us our trespasses, "as we forgive our debtors" or those who trespass against us. It is not Christlike to have no charity in our judgment of others. Indeed, we are taught by Jesus "Judge not, that ye be not judged." This is not in the sense that you are not to know a tree by its fruit, but to judge in the sense of condemning. If we are censorious to extreme we may expect to be judged with like judgment. It is even said of God that he has pity for the weakness of his people. "For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." So, it is said that the merciful shall receive mercy. "Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy."

The noted Hillel, who lived a little before Christ, said, "Do not judge thy neighbor until thou comest into his place." God is forgiving and forbearing, and Jesus taught us by example the same principle. Therefore, we should cultivate it in our lives, and thus may Christ be "formed" in us.

DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

THIRD STUDY.

Romans 12: 15-17. "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men."

See how many things we have already found that enter into the making of a Christian character. If we have been under the impression that it is a slight effort to build up to the standard set in the scriptures, we can begin to see that we have been mistaken. The essentials must be laid deep and solid before we can build thereon the manifestations which will indicate a real desire to be Christ-like, that is, to have him formed in us so that others may discern it, and God will approve it. Let us keep

those in mind that have been noted, as we proceed.

Now, we take up other traits to be built up and added to these. We may feel a little disconcerted and discouraged as we think of the points mentioned, and of those to be added, and what it will mean to attain to the whole, and consider that we are so far short of it.

We may liken ourselves to the student who, beginning with his course of study, thinks on what lies before him, to attain to the position he desires. There is the slow progress; the concentration of mind required; going step by step and no long strides; a multitude of drawbacks and repeated failures. Then, if the teacher were harsh and unreasonable, and disposed to lay heavy tasks and give little help, the outlook would be discouraging, indeed.

This is not true in our case, however. Our Teacher is gentle, kind, forbearing, tender-hearted, sympathetic and ever ready to help, and understands perfectly our needs, so that the "willing and obedient" have much to encourage them at every step. "He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust." So, let us press on, having a heart desire to please him who is so patient and tender with us.

Verse 15. "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." Sympathy with others in their different circumstances and emotions is essential to a helpful Christian character. If we will not try to understand and enter into the emotions of our brethren, and those with whom we are thrown, we cannot get close enough to them to be of help to them. A wall will grow up between us and them, shutting us out of each other's lives, and putting us out of each other's reach. This will be to lose sight of the great example of Jesus, so that we shall never attain in any great measure to the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, and so miss the prize. If we are to "so run as to obtain," we must keep before us one prominent trait of Jesus--"he went about doing good."

We cannot do good to others unless we can enter into their lives, nor can we get any uplift from their lives without being bound to them by common emotions. If, when they rejoice, we are cold and unsympathetic, it will be like pouring cold water upon them. It will be to bring a cloud between them and their sun, and to darken the light that has shown into their hearts. Even if the cloud is over us, we should endeavor with God's help, to show we are glad the sun is shining on some one.

Have you not at times stood where a cloud cast a shadow around you, and looked to the hill ahead where the sunlight is crowning it with beauty? You can hardly take your eyes from it, and you watch eagerly as it draws nearer toward you. Such a feeling will be experienced in "rejoicing with them that do rejoice."

Besides its good effect on you, to lift you up, it will encourage them. If we are cold and look entirely indifferent toward them, it may make them feel that perhaps their own feelings are misleading, and they are deceived, and that they are foolish to think they have any ground for gladness, and we then draw them into our state of feeling, when their state of gladness is what we should be seeking.

David was in a state of gloom while his child was sick unto death, but when it died the expectation of meeting it in heaven changed his aspect to one of gladness. But for the time the child lay sick and in the valley of the shadow of death, his sorrow was real and oppressive. So, even though trying to have faith that the light will break, the shadows in the world are sure to come. The sorrows are real and the grief is sincere.

Jesus knew that this was true, so his great, tender heart was touched with the sorrow of those about him. It is recorded by Mark when Jesus looked upon a great multitude of people, he was "moved with much compassion toward them for they were as sheep not having a shepherd." The grief of Mary and Martha touched the Savior and "Jesus wept." A most comforting description of Jesus as our priest and intercessor is that he can be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities."

How can we, then, have "Christ formed in us," and not "weep with them that weep"? If we are cold and unresponsive to our brethren and sisters when they are in trouble, a chord between us is broken, and their sorrow is the heavier because they feel not our arms about them to hold them up and strengthen them for the load they must carry.

Picture in your mind Paul and the elders of Ephesus when they met at Miletus before he left them to go to Jerusalem, and their grief at the thought that perhaps they should see his face no more. See how closely they stand together. Tears fill their eyes and drop from their cheeks. They hold each other's hands. Their arms are about the neck of the loved apostle. They fall upon their knees on the sand, and in broken voice he leads them to the throne of grace for help in their time of need, while heaving bosoms and choking sobs mark the love that draws them all together, and makes the parting so heart-breaking. Their deep sorrow has bound them together as nothing else could, and chords are drawn about their hearts that shall not break as long as life lasts. It is the result of "weeping with those that weep."

God forbid that our hearts should grow so hard and cold that we cannot weep with them who weep, who have burdens and cares that oppress them, and sorrows that pierce their hearts! If we cannot enter into the valley with them, how shall we help them up to the heights where the sunlight shall kiss away their tears, and the purer air of gospel promise and comfort shall strengthen them to think on earth's mortal plane with purified memories, while a clearer horizon enables them to look with stronger faith and brighter hope toward the land where tears are wiped away by the tender hand of God himself, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away and we shall enter into rest.

Verse 16. "Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits."

This cannot mean that two persons shall always have the same judgment about matters, nor does the expression seem to mean that. It is to have the same mind "toward" one another. There should be the same forbearance between

brethren. There should be the same charity of thought. Harsh judgment must not be indulged. Each should think of the other as a child of God. One may be of strong and educated mind; the other might have the simplicity of a child and be unlearned; but they are to think of each other as brethren. No matter how much they may differ on matters of opinion, they must both be determined that they will keep fellowship in love and treat each other kindly, each remembering that Jesus is the friend of the other and for his love for him laid down his life. We must be kind and tender with the friends of our Master.

This feeling for brethren must be studiously encouraged and cultivated if we are to get along together in peace, and enjoy the company of one another. Although each will have his own judgment, they can get along in agreement as followers of Jesus. They must not be trying to force the judgment of each other. Forbearance is a golden key among brethren in the church. It will win a brother if he sees that we are not disposed to try to lord it over him.

"Mind not high things." A proud and haughty mind will not win love. He who is thus forgets the humble Son of man. He was meek and lowly in heart. He was the Son of the great King of earth and heaven, but he was lowly "in heart." His disposition was truly humble as it came from his heart. It was not mere pretense. Jesus spoke against the Pharisees because they were given to seeking high places. He said they loved the uppermost rooms and the chief seats in the synagogues.

Jesus spoke a parable on this point. (Luke 14: 7-11.) In this he instructs, "Sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher; then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee." "For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Therefore, we should remember that it is contrary to the teaching of Jesus to mind high things.

"But condescend to men of low estate." Passing by and treating with disdain men of low estate would grow out of minding high things. By the use of the word "estate" we cannot understand this sentence to mean low in the sense of vulgar and vile, but it rather refers to those whose fortune and place might be limited as to worldly means, or even to be simple in mind. Jesus showed great sympathy for the poor, and all his followers should emulate his example. To be rich is not necessarily to be proud and haughty, but many give way to the bad influence of riches and show a very hateful spirit toward those less fortunate in their possessions. Such a spirit is most unbecoming in those who are the professed followers of the meek and lowly Jesus. I heard it said of a very intellectual sister in the church that she was just as considerate of the illiterate and poor as she could be, and made herself just as companionable with them as she did with her equals in mind and training. This was commendable, indeed.

"Be not wise in your own conceits." For one to think too highly of himself is to render it impossible for him to

observe the other points in this verse. He would never condescend to be of the same mind toward his brethren that he would have them be toward him. He would look down on them, and have them look up to him. Nor would he feel to condescend to men of low estate; he would always hold himself above them. The third verse of this chapter covers the ground very completely: "For I say through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God has dealt to every man the measure of faith."

When one is wise in his own conceits he will have a disposition to try to drive all others to his way of thinking, for he cannot conceive that any one else knows as much as he or can see as clearly. Would he but think of his state of condemnation and corruption in sin, and that he owes all his hope for the future to the free favor of God, he would not feel puffed up.

"Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?
Like a swift-fleeting meteor, a fast-flying cloud,
A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,
He passeth from life to his rest in the grave."

Verse 17. "Recompense to no man evil for evil." This and the fourteenth verse seem closely related in meaning. While most of the exhortations have reference to the dealings of Christians with one another, it cannot so be said of this verse. This is a general rule that applies between the saints and any and all men. "Recompense to no man evil for evil." The fourteenth verse refers to those who persecute you. This verse is in regard to being wronged but not persecuted.

It is the disposition of some people to take advantage of others, to defraud, and cheat, and lie. God's people must not stoop to such things. If a man defraud you, you must not defraud so as to recompense him in the same measure he did evil to you. If he spread evil reports about you because it is his disposition to lie, you could not lie about him. If he cheats, you cannot cheat; it is beneath your character, for you are to "provide things honest in the sight of all men." You are not to swerve from doing right with all men. You are to tell the truth, to give honest weights, and do justly. It soon stains the character of a member of the church if it is known that he is given to dishonesty in dealings. The law given to Israel was just and good, and so, still is in force. "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have."

In whatever way others may do evil, if it affect us, we are not to do evil on account of their action. Of course, this does not by any means imply that men shall not be held to account before the law, and before magistrates, but it has reference to our taking up matters personally, and individually taking the matter into our own hands. This is more particularly mentioned in the nineteenth verse, so I

will leave it to be more fully treated there.

It should be noted that we are not only to study the scriptures as to how we shall live with our brethren in the church, but we are to live blameless before all men that God may be honored, and that the church may command respect. We cannot be as perfect as was our Master, but his character is to ever stand before us as the mark to which we should press. We may feel to be discouraged at times because we have fallen so far short of it, but shall we go back? No. There is but one word to which we should give heed, and that is to go forward. Every step in that direction should more nearly conform us to what Paul desired so much to see in the Galatians, that Christ should be formed in them; not merely in outward form, but a real heart desire for righteousness, such as was to be seen in the life of Jesus.

DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

FOURTH STUDY.

Romans 12: 18-21. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

Verse 18. It is not presumed that we can live peaceably with all men. Even Jesus had persecutors, and they put him to death, but there was no ground for their evil treatment of him. When he was reviled, he reviled not again. He taught, Love your enemies and pray for them that despitefully use you. Were all men minded as he was there would be universal peace.

The meaning of this verse seems to be that we should so demean ourselves toward all men that we shall not be the cause of trouble. "As much as lieth in you." We cannot govern the conduct of others, but even when they are not disposed to do right by us, if it be possible for us to placate them and get them in better frame of mind and disposition, we are to do it. We are to do all that lieth in us, that is, use our utmost endeavor, to keep peace.

It is all right to plead our rights, but we are to do this in such manner that it will show a Christian character, and not give way to anger and a fighting disposition. Paul used his rights as a Roman citizen, and appealed to Caesar. Some seem to think this would justify going to law against a brother. But not so. Paul appealed from the lowest Roman courts to the highest. This was a civil privilege.

While Jerusalem was being rebuilt, Nehemiah defended those who worked on the walls against those who attacked them. These rights are not abridged by the exhortation to live peaceably with all men so far as we are able to do so.

We are not to become common brawlers and trouble makers, nor to keep the company of such.

I once knew a member of a church who had many lawsuits with his neighbors, and was always in trouble with some one. A brother who was a member of the same church said to me, "I do not see any use of having so much trouble. When differences come up with me and any one, I try to get them to see as I do, but if I cannot, then I let them have their way that time and I try not to have any more business with them, and so can get along with them peaceably." This brother was doing all he could to live peaceably with all men, and he succeeded to a good degree.

It gives you, your church, and your profession a bad reputation if you are of a "fussy" disposition, and contrariwise, it is to your credit, and adds to the good name of your church, and people are much more likely to have confidence in your profession if you live in peace with all men as far as IN YOU LIES. The religion of Jesus is peace and goodwill toward men, and was so heralded when he came into the world.

Some persons who have an experience of grace should not be allowed membership in a church because they let their natural disposition to make trouble, rule them. One such person can keep up trouble in a church, and two of them have often brought about divisions. There is usually a way to adjust matters peaceably if we seek it in a Christ-like spirit. When once the flesh takes a hand then peace is soon broken. Some of our churches are now having trouble because some of the members are not trying honestly and prayerfully to maintain peace. I will notice this more in the study on the next verse. It would be well for individuals when they have been drawn into trouble to ask themselves if they have exhausted all effort to maintain the peace and keep the matter from spreading into the church and being known in the world. The more publicity the matter has the more it will be exaggerated, for talkers will talk, and they may not either understand or try to hold to the truth.

Verse 19. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." Avenging an injury, which is a natural, fleshly course, instead of exercising forbearance and Christian judgment, has made much trouble for individuals and for the churches. The spirit for revenge banishes the desire for peace and stops effort in that direction, and soon spreads the matter like a plague. One member in a church may have suffered some injustice at the hands of another in word or deed, and the flesh at once gets on fire to make him suffer for it. This fire spreads and soon there is a conflagration in the church and many hearts and minds are beyond the reach of reason. The life of some one is demanded to satisfy the avenging spirit.

Passing by the critical opinions on the expression, "but rather give place to wrath," it is safe to take the impressions one would get from the verse as a whole, which seems to be, Avenge not yourselves, for vengeance belongs to God; he will repay. He who cannot do any wrong, and who knows all hearts, will either bring to repentance him who

has given the injury, or cause him to suffer an adequate chastisement. To question that the Lord will do this, is to question the righteousness of the great Judge who shall judge all hearts.

If we attempt to avenge, or to bring what we consider righteous judgment, we are likely to take such a course as will drive away all likelihood of repentance, because hate and vengeful spirit beget their kind usually, and hearts are not softened. When Thomas was filled with unbelief, and Peter denied his Lord, Jesus did not use abusive terms, nor reproach in bitterness, but with tender words and loving looks broke their hearts and brought a proper disposition to make amends for their wrongs.

So, if we cannot approach those who have offended, or whom we imagine to have given injury, without doing so in a vengeful spirit it is better to endure in patience the moving of the divine hand which will always be on the side of right, and who will not suffer that wrong shall finally go unchastened. Finally, we ourselves may be able to have Christ so formed in us that we may go forth in the spirit of meekness even as our dear Lord would go. Then, we are ready to take to ourselves the exhortation in the next verse.

Verse 20. "Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." The basis for this exhortation is to be found in the preceding verse. We are not to avenge ourselves, but to put off this spirit, trusting that the Lord shall sustain the right and deal justly with those who seek to injure us, and take the opposite course which we are assured will be successful. It is to follow the course which Jesus taught and which has been noticed in a preceding verse. "Bless them that curse you; bless and curse not." Jesus said we should do good for evil and pray for them which use us despitefully.

In this verse we are told this course will bring conviction to those who are evilly inclined toward us--it will heap coals of fire on their heads. Any one can treat his friends well, but it is a Christ-like spirit to be gracious to one's enemies, leaving them to settle for their course with him who has all power on high.

You cannot feed him when he is not hungry, nor give him drink when he is not thirsty, but the opportunity will come if your patience and faith will have brought you a willingness to use it. When the time does come, the deed must be done in the spirit of kindness if it is to do good, and not in the hateful show of stooping for a victory. That would ruin it all for it would be avenging with a vengeance.

Verse 21. "Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good." This is, as it were, uncovering the principle which lies beneath all these exhortations. In whatever direction we look--within ourselves or about us--there is the evil influence whose tendency is to lead us away from the Christ character in heart or in deed. Life is one constant struggle against this stream which will carry us down and away from what we should be if Christ is to be formed in us.

One great warning sounds from all the scriptures: Be

not overcome of evil. Adam had warning of the consequences of not standing against it, but he yielded to it, and so sin came and death by sin. Principles have not changed. Evil leads to sin, and sin to death. "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die." This is a warning in the gospel day. The devil tried to overcome Jesus, but he could not. So Paul travailed in spirit that the brethren to whom he wrote might have the Christ character formed in them that they might overcome the evil that is in the world. Yielding to the evil will destroy their joy and happiness here and defeat the purposes of the church. Churches sometimes fail to yield happiness to the members because they have been overcome with evil. Heresies and all forms of unrighteousness which destroy the peace of saints are evil.

Is there any hope of resistance against the floods of evil? It is written, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." If through faith in God and strength through him we can resist the devil, as the word of God assures us, then certainly there is encouragement to accept this exhortation as suitable for our banner and rally to it, trusting in the Lord that it is not a hollow delusion.

Paul encourages to believe that the shield of faith is capable of quenching all the fiery darts of the wicked one, and assures us that he can do all things through him who strengthens him. With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

The life of the saints of God is not all a battle of defense; there is an aggressive movement--"But overcome evil with good." Of course all evil can never be overcome during this life journey. Jesus will destroy the works of the devil. How far reaching this will be we can never know in this world, but these exhortations have to do with God's people here in this life. As before said, keeping from being overcome with evil is a great struggle. This last clause gives us the best weapon we can put into use in fighting evil, and that is by doing good.

Doing good is doing anything that God approves. The things he tells us to do are what he approves, and in keeping his commandment there is great reward. We do not put away sin nor win heaven, but while engaged in the service of God we are overcoming evil. Even thinking upon his name keeps evil from working in the mind during the time thus occupied. When engaged in prayer, if the heart is in the matter, we draw near to God--and near his feet is safety. Listening to the gospel preached, our minds are refreshed upon spiritual matters, and we think and see more clearly on the things of Christ's kingdom, and so are put on our guard concerning the evil that would rob us of the joys of the Lord's salvation. The love and fellowship of the Lord's people help to strengthen us against unbelief and disobedience, which are evils.

We are exhorted to "every good work," for all and each of these are resisting Satan, crucifying to the flesh, forming a character that will the better enable us to stand. Of course, the children of God can do none of these things of themselves. They are exhorted to work out their own salvation, for it is God that worketh in them to will and to

do. So they do not have to walk alone, or to stand in their own strength, but they are to work out their salvation, -- manifest what the Lord has worked in them to do, that they may show their love and devotion to him and his cause. The way they are to do this is to press toward the high mark of the character of Jesus. While it is true that it is so high that they can never reach it, yet every step in that direction brings its own great reward. To be nearer to Jesus brings a blessing that the world cannot give nor can it take it away. The nearer the child of God is to Jesus, the more fully is the world and evil beneath his feet, and the greater the peace and security felt in his strong promises to never leave nor forsake.

With this brief study of the verses I close this series of articles. I feel that it is a mere surface examination, but realize that this has been beneficial to me, and I hope the consideration of them has interested others who will go deeper into the meaning of having Christ formed in us. May the lifting up of its power, the sweet peace of its presence, and the joy that comes with the hallowed overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, be with all that love our Lord Jesus Christ. May we redouble our prayerful efforts not only to overcome evil in our own lives, but in the church and among our brethren and sisters.