

“BY TENDER COMPASSION”

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We would like to consider with you a subject which we have considered many times before as brethren in the Church of Christ. This is a subject which each of us has considered many times in connection with our consecration, and each time we kneel before the Lord in prayer.

As we continue to walk the Narrow Way, as we continue to fulfill the obligations of the consecration that we have made with the Lord, we realize that of ourselves, we are really nothing, and that, except as the Lord demonstrates His tender compassions to us, we could not ever fulfill our vows of consecration. And, I think also that we all recognize, particularly the longer we continue in the Narrow Way, that if it were not for the Lord's giving us the experiences that would help to relieve us of dependencies on the world, the flesh and any support that we have from the brethren—we would set these up as a Golden Calf (as Brother Carl has said). If we get to the point where we begin to rely upon others, even those whom the Lord has provided for our assistance, then the Lord gives us an experience, by tender compassion, to help us to recognize that we cannot depend on others than the Lord Himself. The important thing is to recognize the Lord.

We would like to consider some of the means of our consecration and draw our attention to their application today; for we all recognize that there are difficulties in the Narrow Way. John Bunyan in his book, *Pilgrim's Progress*, pictured these very vividly in the course of the pilgrim along the Narrow Way. I think that particularly in our experiences today—with the difficulties that exist in the Truth movement itself—as well as with our individual lives, we recognize that we need the Lord's tender compassion—we need Him to help us. Only as we rely on Him can we become victors, as we all want to be. If there is one point that our consecration helps us to see, it is that—that it is only by the Lord's Grace that we achieve anything.

As Brother Carl was talking this morning, and as Brother Homer was explaining last night (about the work in Japan), I was thinking about how much that costs—not in dollars and cents, for the Lord is a very generous provider in terms of money (we have no needs along that line, because He prospers the hearts of the brethren to provide whatever is needed). But I was thinking more in terms of planning, in terms of execution of those plans, and in terms of trying to find what the Lord's will IS in our experiences. After all this he says, “This is the little work for you in the Harvest work.” And surely, any one work that we may be involved in, requires the assistance of many different brethren together. And all of this put together can achieve a very small part of the total work that the Lord has for the church on this side of the veil at this time.

And then we realize, in our own minds, how tired we get from the exertion we make, how

exhausted and disturbed we can get sometimes, because our plans just don't work out smoothly. And it takes years and years to get just a little done, and we are exhausted, and we feel we just don't have enough time for other things we consider important. And then we compare it to what Jesus did in 3½ years and we realize how the zeal of the Lord's house did really consume our Lord. And this is the kind of effort that we want to put forth in our consecration, recognizing that it is not easy.

We would like to turn to the Apostle's words in the 12th chapter of Romans and consider what consecration meant to him. I think we're all familiar with the first two verses—they have been repeated in every consecration talk that I have ever heard of; and we think of the Apostle's words in connection with our own consecration. But let's get the perspective the Apostle Paul gives to us. He, in the book of Romans, is discussing with the brethren in Rome—trying to develop in their minds the logic of the reasonableness of sacrifice. And so, let's consider what he's saying just a bit. Starting with the 10th chapter, verses 1 to 5, the Apostle is telling us that Israel strove for righteousness after the Law and not by faith. V. 5: "For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them," and of course, only Jesus was able to do this. Then in verses 6 to 13 the Apostle is telling us that if we have faith in the sacrifice of Jesus, in the righteousness of Him, then we have righteousness by that faith, the righteousness that we receive from God. We are acquainted here with the thought that it's important to know God, to know the provision that He has made if we are going to serve him. And then from the 16th verse on, the Apostle tells us that we have a great privilege, by faith to be His ministers.

In much of the fellowship that we've received yesterday and today at this convention, it has come to our minds frequently, and in our discussions that we are walking a walk of faith. And we understand some of the things happening in the world today because we have faith in the scriptures. We may not be familiar with all the influences that are working in the world today. Those in authority realize the depths of imagination for evil. We have a general understanding of world events from our study of the Volumes; and we are aware of the fact that those in authority in the world today cannot change the course of events. We are in the "time of trouble" today, leading on to eventual anarchy. We have an understanding of these conditions, because we walk not by sight, but by faith.

In Romans 11, the Apostle is discussing the election by Grace and not of works. And he's emphasizing this because, when he comes to the 12th chapter, he's going to make his point based on this. In Psalm 94, verse 17 we read: "Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence." Ours is a walk of faith and not of works. The Lord deals with us in our minds, with His spirit, to enlighten and strengthen us. And when the Apostle introduces the 12th chapter he says: "I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." This word "mercies" means "tender compassion." "I

beseech you therefore, brethren, by the tender compassions of God..." And in presenting our bodies a reasonable sacrifice, the scriptural thought is that we lay it beside the body of Jesus, reflecting on the Tabernacle sacrifices of the Sin Offerings. The invitation is clear.

And then in V. 2 the Apostle tells us, in capsule form, what we must do. Here the key word is "transform" our minds. "And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." That is a very succinct statement—it is all there stated very briefly.

But the rest of the chapter is not to be ignored, because it tells us what our daily experiences will be and how we must react to them in our transformation. In the 3rd to 8th verses the Apostle is trying to help us to see the inadequacies of our own self-estimation. We are not to think of ourselves as separate and above our brethren. The key note seems to be humility; and it has been said by the world that in order to build a worthwhile structure, the foundation must be meekness and humility. We believe that's what the Apostle is saying—we must be humble in spirit. Each of us should be aware of the fact that our own self opinion is far more exalted than it should be. Paul goes on to say, "but to think soberly." This is very specific. He's trying to tell us that when we estimate ourselves in our own positions, it isn't a sober thought, but it's an exalted thought. "But to think soberly as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." Here it is again—it's a walk by "faith," and the only way that we can recommend ourselves to God is by that faith; and to whatever degree of faith we have, the Lord will bless us, and to whatever degree of faith we lack he will withhold His blessing.

The dear Apostle John in 1 John 5:4 tells us that our faith is what overcomes the world. And recognizing that fact, and tying it back to V. 2—"be ye not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds"—the Apostle here then, in the 3rd verse is saying, "according to every man the measure of faith." The Apostle here is saying, "Your transformation is going to happen because of the degree of your faith." So really what we're working on is the growth and development of that faith. The higher the faith, the more the blessings from the Lord, and the more the ability to transform our minds.

In verses 4 to 6 we read, "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith." Here again the Apostle is incorporating the thought of the measure of faith as being the important measure. Frequently the Lord has reminded us that it's an easy deception to fall into that we start measuring our brethren, not according to their faith, but according to their natural

talents, their appearances, their glibness of tongue, their material wealth, their apparent success in the world. All of these are very easy to use as measures of recognition, but none of them are valid. The Lord is saying here, through the Apostle, that it is according to our faith.

Then he goes on to say in Vs. 7 and 8 that all of these are qualities that are necessary in the Body of Christ. (The word “simplicity” is rendered “liberally” in the margin.) The Apostle Paul is trying to help us to get a proper perspective of ourselves as well as of our brethren. And he’s saying that the basis of it all is by faith. As we see the brethren with their faith, rejoicing in the Truth, then we can rejoice with them and acknowledge that the Lord has blessed them. As we do not see this, or if we use some other measure to recommend the brethren to us, then we are exercising the spirit of the world. We are being conformed to the world and not being transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Then in the 9th to 21st verses the Apostle is showing us the heavenly qualities that are important for all of us, but only after He has given us the proper perspective with one another. He has said in V. 4 that we are many members of one body, and this is an important thought for all of us, particularly today with so much difficulty in the Truth movement, that we are all members of one body and that is until the time we take ourselves out of the body. The Lord is not going to sift us out unless we do things that indicate to Him that we don’t want to be a member of that “one body” where there is one faith, one baptism and we are members of this one body by the one spirit of faith.

So starting with this concept of “one body” the Lord is developing it then through the Apostle’s instruction in Verses 9 to 21, and we would like to consider some of the thoughts there. But we’d also like you to consider your own experiences and the difficulties that may exist amongst the brethren today. Because this is a one sided conversation, let each of us try to develop in his own mind some examples that might be helpful in applying the principles to the difficulties we are having today. Then we may go home from this convention and exercise some influence to help correct some of these difficulties.

The Lord has said that divisions would come, and He has made it very clear that there’s a warning against those who are trying to produce their own teachings to draw disciples after themselves. And he said the warning is particularly applicable to our period of the church at the end, just before the deliverance of the Church. So if we are to say that it is not happening, we are ignoring what the Lord says is happening. But the point here is that, recognizing that it is happening, let us keep our feet on the ground, and be true to the Lord in our faith and spirit; and then He will develop in us that true character that will keep us in the body.

The first point that the Apostle makes, in his careful enumeration of heavenly qualities, is

the point of love. In the 9th verse we read, “Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.” “Dissimulation” means hypocrisy or carelessness, pretense. This means that we have love in form, in appearance, but we don’t have love in our hearts. Love in form and appearance is to say one thing and do another. It’s to say we believe one thing and then in our hearts feel a different way. It’s to be dishonest in our love. It’s to say we love a certain person who is striving to serve the Lord, more than we love another person who is equally striving to serve the Lord. It’s to say, “Well, it’s easy to love that person because I agree with him as opposed to this other person with whom I don’t agree on certain aspects of the Truth, and I can’t love him.” The question is not the degree of love. The question is love at all. If there are brethren we can not love at all (we can’t find anything good in them), then we ought to question our perspective, because the Lord still loves them for some good in them, even though we may not see that good. Therefore we must struggle and strive to find those good qualities in our brethren. It may mean that there are certain actions and words that we do not admire and we can not love them for those, but we must love them for the good qualities that the Lord sees in them. And the only way we are going to do that is by the exercise of our faith. We may find ourselves at times wanting to withdraw to a certain degree from them because of the influence they have that is disturbing. It may be a good idea to withdraw, then we can get a better perspective. But if that withdrawing means that we can not love them or we have to withhold ourselves from them to the point of not loving them, then we are not obeying the Lord—“Let love be without dissimulation.”

Then the apostle attaches to this thought of love, “Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good;” showing that in our love to others we are to recognize the evil qualities and the good qualities, and to abhor that which is evil. (The word “abhor” here means to intensely hate.) Now we’re not talking about abhorring individuals, hating individuals, but abhorring that which is “evil”—that which may be stumbling them or stumbling us—that’s what we don’t want to love in any sense. And if we’re having difficulties in the Narrow Way, whether they be in our relationships with our brethren, or some internal fighting that we are having, then we should very well try to find out what the influences are that we’re allowing in our lives. If a difficulty seems to persist and we just don’t seem to be able to get over it, then we can say to ourselves, “The Lord is not pleased with my influences;” so in going to the influences in our lives we can say “What influence is it that is worldly or fleshly or devilish in some way?” and get rid of that influence. And then we will find that the problems we’ve been having really do clear up. But we will do that only if we abhor that which is evil and cleave to that which is good. And when we see good qualities in our brethren we want to cleave to them and love them.

And then the Apostle says in V. 10, “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.” Rotherham translates this to be “Tenderly affectioned one to another with brotherly love.” Perhaps you haven’t had the unfortunate experience that I have had, but in trying to stand for the Truth there have been

experiences in which “tender affection” seems to be anywhere but there. Our relations with others, who thought they were standing for the Truth just as loyally as we thought we were, soon disintegrated to the point of personalities; and this was unfortunate. The reason for this was that we weren’t keeping our minds on the Lord and we weren’t being “kindly affectioned one toward another.” Those of you who have children know, unquestionably, that the child freezes when he detects an air of annoyance or impatience in the parent’s voice; but if the parent can control himself, and I am not suggesting that any of us (certainly not I), are well enough controlled to do this all the time; but if the child can detect in the voice an encouragement, a tender affection, then the same problem that previously could have disintegrated to a frozen child, can be overcome and the child grows from it. And that is the way the Lord is dealing with us. He is exercising tender compassion toward us and if we feel that our brethren need growth and development that we can help with, then we can know that we can do it by tender affection.

“In honor preferring one another.” The Scriptures abound in references on how we ought to put others before ourselves. I think Phil. 1:9 is very helpful along that line: “And this I pray, that your love may abound [or be pre-eminent], yet more and more in [personal] knowledge and in all judgment [or perception].” As we detect the Lord’s spirit and the Lord’s blessing of our brethren, then our love may abound more and more and, in honor, we can prefer them, because we see that the Lord is blessing them. This often causes problems in the sense that in deferring to one another, we often leave a job undone. If this happens then we have missed the point. Our deference to another is to recognize his good qualities and to encourage him in them. But if the Lord does not bless their judgment to provide a solution or the help that’s needed, then we should act. But we should be sure that they have a full opportunity before we take the opportunity.

And that love is in “knowledge” and I think as we study the Truth and as we grasp it more and more and our faith grows more and more, not only is our knowledge of the Truth enlarged (and we rejoice with others who also rejoice in the Truth) but we then can be more compassionate, more sympathetic, more encouraging to our brethren who have not yet developed this.

The dignity of this love is in the fact that we have relied on the Lord and not ourselves, nor our personal talents nor our own blessings—we have exercised the Lord’s spirit in our relationship to others. I think also that when we see our brethren working in the Lord’s field, whether it be on a personal basis, or on a grander scope, we can rejoice with them. And frequently the rejoicing is easy to show outwardly, but the test of true rejoicing is when it comes from the heart. Are we truly rejoicing because they’ve had these blessings—are we truly delighted for their encouragement and the blessings the Lord has given to them; or do we, in some measure wish that the privilege and blessing had come to us? We can examine our own hearts and see how the Lord’s blessing of others affects us.

In V. 11 the Apostle goes on to say, “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.” The “not slothful in business” is used by some of our nominal Christian brethren to mean that they ought to spend a good deal of their efforts making a good living and thereby providing a good 10% for their church. This isn’t the thought at all. “Business” to the Christian has a very wide application. For instance, we are not to be idle in our studies. We not only sit down to study, but we try to be alert and not go to sleep. If we have difficulty along this line we are to avoid the use of a chair that will induce sleep, or avoid a lighting condition that would put us to sleep. Or if we wish to study after eating a meal, we should exercise some to get the blood circulating. And then we should be diligent in our study and not just wander all over the place. Sometimes it’s easy when we use the Reprints to look up something, we allow ourselves to get distracted by other subjects and pretty soon we find we’re far afield from our original point of study. Even though we might find encouraging and helpful thoughts and beautiful ideas—if we don’t diligently stick to our subject, we waste precious time. So we need to be careful that we plan our study and that we provide the proper conditions necessary for our best study.

And we need to be careful most of all that our desire for study is not just because we have to meet a need, like tomorrow’s meeting, but our desire for study is because we love the Lord so much that this is one more way that we can be close to him. If this is our motive in studying, He will bless, and this in turn will lead to blessing of the brethren through us. The Lord will help us to see things more clearly—He will give us thoughts and helps that will be a blessing to our brethren as we fellowship together in study meetings.

“Fervent in spirit”—this means energetic in spirit. This reminds us of Jesus’ sacrifice —“the zeal of thine house hath consumed me.” And then we can ask ourselves “does it really consume us?” Is the zeal of the Lord’s house consuming our body, or do we really set ourselves aside so much comfort and relaxation and provision for our bodily needs that there is very little left to use in the Lord’s service?

I don’t know how many of you are aware of who Vince Lombardi was. I’m certainly not a sports fan, but in our business, we used a film that he made. He was a very famous football coach in the professional world, and our business keeps showing this film to the personnel, because of the motive Mr. Lombardi is showing. Our company is trying to get the workers more motivated to do a good job and Mr. Lombardi has said “There are only three things in a man’s life that are important—his God, his family, and the football team that he represented.” I was glad to hear him put first, the Lord. He was a Catholic and evidently a very good one. But he put the Lord first, and that is the way we should. The first thing of importance in our lives should be the Lord. We should be fervent in spirit, energetic in spirit, we should have the same zeal that consumed Jesus’ perfect human life in 3½ years—that same spirit that is available to you and me. Jesus didn’t waste it, but he used it and it consumed Him in only 3½ years. And He had so much more to spend

over that 3½ years than you and I put together.

The zeal of the Lord's house is available to us, if we will let it consume us in serving Him. So we must be fervent in spirit serving the Lord. And then as the Apostle Paul knew full well, what this would mean to us, when you are not slothful in business, when you are diligent in your studies, when you are fervent in spirit, then you are going to need these things. And he enumerates them in the next verse (12), "Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer." With these three we can experience the faith development and the works of the previous verse.

"Rejoicing in hope"—are we really "rejoicing in hope?" or does our hope some way bother us—are we disturbed? Do we have only a partial hope because we have not been diligent enough in our study? Or do we truly rejoice in it? I think sometimes today, particularly with the difficulties amongst the brethren (that we all have) we get belligerent and we get overly zealous, perhaps—we are not balanced up with tender compassion. We get so determined and so fixated in our opinions that we can't hear what the other brethren are saying. Because, even if we're right, in order to help brethren, we have to know what they're saying—we have to know where the fallacy of their arguments are or their beliefs. We have to understand their beliefs, so we can determine the areas where we can be of help. It's a time when all of us have to hate the evil, but love the individuals who are guilty of the evil. None of us are so free from evil that we don't need some help from our brethren. We must be rejoicing in our hope, and when we are trying to help our brethren see more clearly the joys and the great blessings of our faith, we must be rejoicing in our own minds and hearts, if we are to help them rejoice in them.

We must be "patient in tribulation." This word for patience means patience in the sense of cheerfulness. It doesn't mean this today in modern Greek language; but in the ancient Greek, it meant that we cheerfully endured. And this is difficult, isn't it? because the tribulations here are not just simple difficulties. The word "tribulation" here is the same word that is used for a threshing machine. Are we patient in tribulation? It sort of reflects on our condition in the Harvest, because that's when the threshing machine is used, and we are in the Harvest, and are being threshed and threshed and threshed to separate the head of the wheat from the straw. And so in our daily walks with the brethren and with the Lord, we are to be patient, cheerfully accepting the experiences of the threshing machine of the Harvest in our walk in the Narrow Way.

And then "continuing instant in prayer"—and this means that we have this attitude constantly and in every association we have with the Lord whether it be an experience of one moment or an experience of the next moment. Our association with the Lord is so close and so endearing that we are "instant in prayer" and we thank him for the little evidences of His love to us in our daily experiences. And it doesn't mean that we have to

get down on our knees each time—it just means that we have to recognize that each provision is from the Lord and we are immediately thankful to Him. It means that when we've asked Him for a blessing and He does bless us, we recognize immediately that the Lord has answered our prayer. Even in the rejoicing in our hope and our patience in tribulation, we are instant in prayer. And by these three attitudes toward the Lord, we can be diligent in our study and in our service to Him.

Then in Vs. 13 the Apostle starts to talk about our immediate relationship to our brethren. He says, first of all “distributing to the necessity of saints.” That does help us to remember that the Lord has been tenderly compassionate to us from the time we were born in sin and shapen in iniquity, until the time he has brought us up to the level of faith so that we could make the consecration, and then He could accept that consecration and give us His Holy Spirit, and helped us to continue on until finally He brings us off more than victors in our resurrection change. That same sort of attitude is necessary in our relationships in the body of Christ: distributing or sharing with the necessities of the saints.

And then the Apostle emphasizes this by saying “given to hospitality.” Now the King James translation loses something here, because “given to hospitality” means that you're just disposed to be hospitable; but that is not the thought. The thought means to seek out opportunities for hospitality. We truly do look for opportunities for serving our brethren. Why?—because we want to make them more comfortable?—because we want to make them healthier and happier? Well those are good so long as they contribute to the growth of the new creature in them. The objective of all of our relationships with our brethren is the growth and development of the new creature. And so when we are seeking opportunities for being hospitable to our brethren, we are seeking for opportunities for encouraging them in the Truth and growth in the Lord and the blessings the Lord has given to us. That is the zeal of the Lord's house consuming us. The hospitality of our lives is not limited by the size of our houses—it's limited only by the size of our hearts. Some of you have entertained in very small houses, but we felt welcome and that the Lord's spirit was there. We rejoiced to be there because after leaving we felt we had been encouraged as new creatures, and you felt stronger in the faith. We could go to a palace and feel the coldness that's there—the house is large enough, there's no question about that—it's the heart that isn't large enough—the heart is small. So when we're thinking about the hospitality to others, we don't look at the size of the house; we don't look for the beauty of furniture; or the wall hangings that we may have. We look to the condition of our hearts—is it expansive enough to include others for the development of the new creature? If it is then we can exercise it toward others. If not, then we have some heart stretching to do, don't we?

The Apostle then goes on to say, “Bless them that persecute you; bless and curse not.” That's kind of hard isn't it? It's kind of hard for the flesh. But when we realize that the

Heavenly Father was maligned and accused by innumerable people, and that he provided His only Son for their salvation, we can realize that this isn't really a very big request to make of us. How do we bless them that persecute us? We provide for them the things that they need, not to continue persecution, but to overcome this persecution: again in tender compassion that the Lord has provided for us. And then, in case we haven't gotten the point, the Apostle reiterates it—He emphasizes the first part of the verse by saying “bless and curse not.” That word “curse” there means to speak evil or to speak maliciously, or to pray against or to wish evil against someone. And so, when the scriptures say “bless and curse not,” it is saying, “don't do a good work for them and then go behind their backs and talk about them and malign them and say all sorts of evil things about them.” That's not what we mean when we say bless and encourage them even though they are persecuting you. And I think sometimes when we are thinking about our situation in the truth movement today, that this is a very applicable scripture; because, very often it's easy to say “I love this brother who's doing some evil and malicious thing to me,” and then go behind his back and talk about him. The Lord said that if you're doing that you're not loving your brother.

And then the Apostle goes on to say in V. 15, “Rejoice with them that do rejoice and weep with them that weep.” I think that this is particularly appropriate for us in the narrow way when we see our brethren achieving things in the Lord's service, achieving things in their growth of faith. What a blessing that is, what an encouragement! If we are truly set for the defense of the Gospel and for the growth of the new creature, we can say, “Yes, I do rejoice with them who are rejoicing because they are growing in the Truth; and I do weep with them who are having difficulties and sad experiences because they are missing some victory that they need to have.” How do we feel when we rejoice in the Lord's blessing? We should feel as they do when they are rejoicing in the Lord's Truth and blessings. And how do we feel when we have failed in the victory in the good fight of faith? We should feel the same when our brethren fail; even though they may be persecuting us—if we cannot weep with them when they weep then we are not being faithful members of the one body.

“Be of the same mind, one toward another.” There's a need for consistency in everything. The world today, by the use of computers and advanced technology is trying to standardize innumerable things that they considered not standardizable before. And they're doing it in some cases successfully, and in others they're discovering the deficiencies of reason and logic in their previous developments. But the Lord is saying, “Be of the same mind, one toward another.” And what mind is that? It is the mind of Christ, isn't it? It is the mind of encouragement to the new creature; the mind of encouragement in the faith, in the growth and the development and the substantiation of the faith; the determination that we have only one thing to do: and that is to be members of the New Creation and to develop ourselves as New Creatures. There is nothing so enviable to the Devil as the working, the objective of God in the New Creation. And to

whatever extent we are not of the same mind one to another, we're disintegrating and fragmenting the Body of Christ.

We have to be of one mind one toward another. And in our relationships with others, sometimes this is a bit difficult, because they don't seem to have the one hope and the one faith that we rejoice in. But we must try to find the common bond and develop on that. And if faith disintegrates, we can try to be helpful; but unless there is the one faith and the one love for the Lord, a brother will take himself out of the new creation, and that is between himself and the Lord. We can try to encourage the brethren in the Truth, but we cannot align ourselves with a disintegrating faith.

“Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.” Well, if we were to take this the way it is stated in the King James translation, it would contradict everything else the Apostle had said to us up to this point. It isn't that we condescend to men of low estate, because we're all men of low estate—the apostle has told us this in 1 Cor. 1:26—“not many wise and not many noble.” The thought is not that we should ever condescend to men of low estate, but it means that we should be content with mean things. In fact, I think the thought is truly that we should make an effort to reduce the sophistication of our lives to the minimal things so we can be free of all the extra burdens of society and difficulties, so we may develop and grow in faith. “Mind not high things”—put them aside because they will distract you from the Lord. But be content with the mean things—with the Manna that the Lord has provided us. We're not looking for quail (or we shouldn't be) because it will make us sick—the Lord has provided us with manna.

In V. 17 the apostle says, “Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.” At this point that goes without saying, doesn't it? Or does it? The apostle has said it again, because we need it to be said. “Provide things honest in the sight of all men. Recompense no man evil for evil.” Though we may be persecuted, we would withhold any persecution, any vilification, any accusations, just as our Lord did—both, as a spirit being, before he was brought to earth, and during the time of his greatest trial—he withheld his tongue although he said he could bring angels to defend him. The Lord has said “in my time, I will bring the judgments, but only because you have not executed judgments in your own condemnation of others now.” Because if you do it now he will not do it then—God really blames those who have taken upon themselves the accusation and vilification: returning evil for evil.

“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” And this is not a request to compromise the Truth. That's why the apostle said “If it be possible.” if the truth can be upheld without compromise. Now that means, not only the Truth in doctrine, but the Truth, in the spirit in which we hold to the doctrine; because the Lord says that those who do not receive the Truth in the love of it, are the ones that are going to be

disintegrating in their Truth—they're the ones from whom He is going to take the Truth. If we have the Truth, in the love of it, then we will defend it in a loving compassionate way. And I don't think that there are any of us that can say that the first time that we had to defend the Truth, we did it in a loving compassionate way; maybe even the second and third and fourth time, we failed on that score. But the objective is that we can defend the Truth in such a loving compassionate way that we would bring no dishonor to the Lord either in doctrine or in conduct.

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto 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.” We would be inconsistent if we thought in this way—“well that person is bothering me, so I am going to take this handful of charcoal briquettes off my burner and put it on the top of his head.” That's not the point at all, is it? Where was it that the high priest put coals of fire?—in the Holy, wasn't it? And on it he put incense—the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit. And so the thought is that when you are being provoked by your enemies or by brethren who seem to act like enemies (at times, perhaps), you take the coals, the experience of trouble and difficulty and you provide incense, and there will be perfume, fragrance. And this is the kind of conduct that we ought to have toward our brethren—not to throw hot coals at them, but to provide in the tribulation experience that sweet incense that will produce (from that experience) acceptableness before the Lord. For he says, “Vengeance is mine”—He will repay; not that he's going out as a wrathful vengeful God, but He's interested in the just recompense for the evil and the difficulties that exist. And if we want to recommend the Lord's judgment, then we will provide the right spirit in the matter that will produce that sweet incense and fragrance that makes the whole thing acceptable to the Lord.

And then, as a wind up argument, the Lord, through the apostle, reminds us of the greatest difficulty that we have—“Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.” May the Lord help us in our efforts toward tender compassions in this narrow way of sacrifice that we may exercise the same spirit toward others, and the Truth, and the love of the Truth, that the Lord has exercised and blessed us with.