

GOD'S WILL AS TO OUR ENEMIES

Romans 12

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The 12th chapter of Romans, which seems at a first glance like a necklace of valuable pearls, with almost every verse a distinct and detached epigram will be found upon closer examination to be a unit. It is in fact an amplification of and an application of that last line of the second verse which reads: "That good and acceptable and perfect will of God." There are three alpine peaks in the mountain range of the whole chapter. The first is that famous exhortation to entire consecration and world renunciation in verses one and two. The second is at the ninth verse, in the complimentary counterpart of this in a love made pure and a perfect abhorrence of sin. The third is at the last verse in the certain possibility of a more than Victorious Life where we are not only victors over, but more than conquerors, able to vanquish evil with good.

Now all that intervenes and passes there may be compassed under three headings:

I. God's Perfect Will with regard to ourselves. (ver. 3-8).

II. God's Perfect Will with regard to our friends and fellows in the Christian Brotherhood. (ver. 10-16).

III. God's Perfect Will with regard to enemies. (ver. 17-20)

It is this that will engage our attention now. Keeping in mind if you please, that in the opening introduction to the wonderful chapter as a whole, we are assured that we may prove it. That is, we may personally put the Father's will to probate, and come away with our own share of the inheritance. Or again, that we may have it demonstrated in ourselves that God has willed us such an heritage to be enjoyed and exhibited here and now in this present life.

With the matter of enemies, it is His will first of all that we have as few as possible. Here is the way it reads: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Of course, we are not responsible for the other porcupine's quills. The holiness of the Son of Man did not exempt Him from the malicious enmity of men of all classes—and enmity too, even unto the death. The servant is not above his Master. "If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you." And it is even written, "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you," Nevertheless, beloved, more of their enmity may "lie in us" than possibly we have supposed. Much of it may be in our mouths. One of our Canaan luxuries is in the gracious art of letting the other party have the last word when we know they are wrong. Controversy sometimes leads to combat, and often to strife. Then, too much insistence upon our own rights—when they are right (and not your wishes) soon breeds variance, and this is but the little end of a wedge which Satan is alert to drive in to separation and a little later to alienation and antagonism. There are many enemies about property and over financial matters — some of them very small. But peace is of such great value that God's will is such that we can afford to sacrifice or forego everything, but principle for peace' sake. Holiness is peaceful, peaceable and peace making, and the only peace it will not consent to is the peace of surrender, truce or compromise. Of course, it has nothing to do with the giving of some-

body "a piece of one's mind."

But seeing that doing the best we can do there will be some enemies, our next concern is as to God's will concerning them. We observe that at least two of these injunctions are negative.

1. There is to be no "tit for tat"—"Recompence to no man evil for evil." (ver. 17) That was the old man or the old woman I heard saying to somebody the other day: "You may bet I gave them as much as they gave me."

2. Retaliation or revenge is forbidden. God claims a sovereign right of monopoly on this. For He says: "Vengeance is mine." Hence the command found elsewhere for us to "Judge not that we be not judged." We must not "have it in" for someone, unless like Joseph (the very one for whom I am named) who "got it in for those brothers that sold him," that is, he got corn in to feed them when they might have starved from the famine.

This leads us up to the three positives in the Father's will for our treatment of enemies.

1. "Provide things honest" (or every way upright) in the sight of all men—both the enemies who are watching for flaws in our conduct as well as admiring friends who admire and approve our conversation.

2. "Give place to wrath." Let their anger run its course, and their vituperations and accusations exhaust themselves; as the Saviour, before Pilate and His false accusers, "opened His mouth to answer never a word." And somewhat like a Jewish merchant of whom we have been told, who was abused, berated, accused and vilified with all sorts of epithets by an enraged customer who had been disappointed in a transaction. The merchant quietly held his peace, and when the other man ran out, he simply and kindly replied to him, "But, mister, I am otherwise all right, ain't I?"

3. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst give him drink." (ver. 20). Now if we are alert, we will see that our passion for his soul is to be supreme in our attitudes toward the worst enemy we could possibly have. This is the incentive adduced: "For in so doing we shall heap coals of fire on his head." That is the hope of melting his wicked and stubborn heart. Why should I have more compassion on God's enemies in heathen lands and be ready to make more concession and effort for their salvation than for my own enemies in the home land?

Lastly, "Bless them which persecute you; bless and curse not." (ver. 14). An old preacher in a village or little town adjacent to New York City gave a very literal application to this text one day. His wife had sent him to the store to get a few necessities for their home table. The old preacher's memory was not so good now and he got a few things she had not ordered, and forgot to get one or two that she very much needed. Living only on the worn-out preachers' pension they had to manage very closely and she asked him if he would go back with things they did not want, and get those they needed. He was very sorry for his mistake and said most humbly and heartily, "Yes, dear, I will gladly go back." The grocer, however, chanced to be a son of Belial and in a very bad humor he began to upbraid the old saint, and tell him he was old enough to know what he wanted and not to trouble him that way. He even swore at him and cursed him and that quite vehemently. Whereupon with trembling hands

the old minister lifted his faded beaver hat, laid it gently on the counter and raising his hands and lifting his eyes to heaven divinely proceeded to announce the benediction. The storekeeper cried out, "Why, old man, what is the matter? What do you mean? What are you going to do?" "O," said the preacher, "it is more than forty years since I have had occasion to obey one of my Lord's commandments. It is that long or more since anybody has cursed me. But the Lord asks me to 'bless them that curse me,' and I pray now that the blessing of my Lord may come upon your business, upon your home, and upon your soul, in the name of the Prince of Peace, our Lord Jesus Christ!" I am pretty sure that grocer never cursed any more old preachers. And who knows but that his soul was saved. While we may not often be called thus literally to pronounce the benediction on our enemies, yet we may ever be ready and on the look-out to bless them or theirs in some gracious or substantial way.—The Sky Pilot.

"CLOUDS WITHOUT WATER": Jude 12

In the East clouds without water are great disappointments to the people, where they depend so much on the rain. The figure is a striking one because the clouds do not give out that which the people have a right to expect.

1. Love that has lost its emotion is a cloud without water. Such love is cold, dead and useless. It is like the cold embers on the hearth where once there burned a fire warm and bright.

When Jesus talked to the disciples on the way to Emmaus their hearts "burned within them." We should all be disciples with burning hearts; for when the hearts has ceased to burn with the emotion of love for Christ it has ceased to beat in harmony with God.

2. Faith that has lost its power is a cloud without water. Faith ought to have all power. A great deal of it has no power. We ought to have power enough in our faith to remove mountains and to move God. Our faith should be so great that it can overcome the world; the world of sin, sorrow and death. Paul was able to say at the end of life that he had kept the faith and it now kept him in death.

3. Work that has lost its enthusiasm is a cloud without water. The spirit has gone out of it, and when the spirit of enthusiasm goes out of our work it leaves nothing but the corpse of failure. The spirit is the thing that counts in the home, the church, the nation and life.

The spirit of service must possess us if we are going to follow the Christ who went about doing good. Without enthusiasm but little will ever be accomplished.

4. Prayer that has lost its passion is a cloud without water. There are a few things which are indispensable to the Christian life, and prayer is one of them. But prayer must be more than a habit; it must be the source of communion with God and an opportunity to intercede for others. The prayer of faith will not only save the sick, as we are told, but it will do almost everything else. Prayer can do anything that God can do.—The Christian Herald.

What man can judge his neighbor aright, save he whose love makes him refuse to judge him?—George MacDonald.