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Exhortation

“Let this mind be in you . . .”

10. “Christ pleased not himself”

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THE PASSAGE in the Epistle to the Romans from which the phrase “Christ pleased not himself” is taken (15:3) has to do with the responsibilities we have one to the other for spiritual wellbeing and development. In Romans 14 Paul stresses the need for careful consideration when contemplating the behaviour and attitude of others concerning matters for which there is no detailed prescription in Scripture. The examples he considers are the observing of special days and the eating of certain meats (vv. 2-6). “Let us not therefore judge”, he writes, lest “a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall” causes one to turn from the “way” (v. 13).

He then continues in chapter 15: “We then that are strong [in the faith] ought to bear the infirmities of the weak” (v. 1). The strong have a duty to assist the weak as they struggle to understand how best to apply the principles of the life in Christ to the many and varied situations that life in the world throws up. That assistance may require that the strong abstain from an activity which their conscience allows them to participate in and which brings them pleasure. It may mean that they should desist from forcing on others an attitude they themselves are very comfortable with, when there is a danger that others may be adversely affected.

The aim of Christ’s disciple should be to deny him- or herself when, because of that denial, another is edified: “Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification” (v. 2). And, behind Paul’s insistence that “even Christ pleased not himself” (v. 3) is surely this exhortation to his fellow disciples, and to us now: This was the way of the Lord Jesus, let it be yours; this was the mind that was in Christ Jesus, let it be your devout intent.

In his first epistle to Corinth he wrote: “even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (10:33). Surely there is to be seen here the advice he gave in Romans, and his practising

of the principles he preached there. There seems to be an echo of these things also in the second epistle, when he claimed: “I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (12:10).

In Romans 15:3, however, he draws on this quotation from Psalm 69 to illustrate his claim about Christ: “the reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon me” (v. 9). Christ accepted the reproaches. When people passed by the cross and “reviled him, wagging their heads” (Mt. 27:39), he was silent. He did not retaliate, he suppressed what might have been his wish and desire under such circumstances, and yielded to His Father’s will.

Peter expresses it like this: “when he was reviled, [he] reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to Him That judgeth righteously” (1 Pet. 2:23). To have done otherwise would have meant that the example he set for others, if followed by them, would not have led to the building up of acceptable characters to present to God. There would have been no one good enough “to open the book” (Rev. 5:1-5). The Lamb provided would not have been able to present himself unspotted and unblemished. He would not have been able to bear “our sins in his own body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24). We must be ever mindful of these things.

Our application of this principle might seem not to be as easy as some other principles, for we cannot always know when we are going to cause others to doubt or stumble. It requires us to know our brethren and sisters. It requires us to respond to what might be thought of as criticism of us, not with a ‘Who do they think they are, telling me what to do?’ attitude, but with the mind that was in Christ Jesus. It requires us to esteem others better than ourselves, and to be as concerned as was our Master that not one is lost.

Do we meet these requirements?