



Conducted by
James Gardiner

THE meaning of Matt. 5:25 has always puzzled me—could you please explain? “Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou has paid the uttermost farthing.”

Taken, by itself, the above passage may seem to be suggesting to us that we should avoid being in disagreement with anyone, and avoid it so strongly that we should be quick to agree with our adversary. I am sure that our Lord never intended that we should remain mute when our course was clearly to speak up in defence of what we believe to be just and true, or that he ever suggested that we compromise truth in exchange for a quiet passage through life. Contention must certainly not be sought for any reason or pleasure of our own, but neither must honest controversy be avoided on any grounds—even brotherly love. Indeed Jude exhorts us to be contentious provided of course we are contending “for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” We are to love our brethren more than we love God’s truth? Can we contend for the faith and at the same time escape controversy?

“Going to Law”

When, however, we read Matt. 5:25 in conjunction with its parallel passage in Luke 12:58, we see that litigation was what Jesus had in mind, and that court proceedings and going to law were the things with which his advice was primarily concerned. In this brief allegory we are supposed to have an adversary (at law) who presumably has a just cause against us and who would certainly gain a verdict against us were the cause to come before the courts. We are advised to agree with our adversary while we are in the way with him (i.e. while we have still the opportunity, and certainly before the case comes before the judge) and to make reparation to him in advance of the trial,—to settle out of court, in other words. Jesus probably had in mind those who were debtors to others, because his mention in verse 26 of not being allowed out of prison until the uttermost farthing had been paid seems indicative of a debtors’ prison. The debtor remained in such a prison until he or his friends could repay the debt; and if the amount could not be raised then the debtor would die a prisoner. The advice of Jesus is that we should avoid a situation whereby we would appear as offenders in a court of law: to be quick to be reconciled to our adversary. Later in this chapter at v. 40 He says, “If any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.”

Many years later Peter expressed much the same sentiment when he said that to suffer as a Christian was not a matter of shame, “but let none of you suffer as thieves, murderers, busybodies and evildoers” (1st Peter 4:15). “Owe no man anything” (Rom. 13:8).

To Jesus, therefore (according to this passage—Matt. 5:25, 26) it was deplorable for his disciples to find themselves in courts of law, and something which they must avoid in their dealings with their fellowmen.

If it is deplorable for Christ's disciple to go to law with his fellowmen, it is infinitely more terrible for Christ's disciple to go to law with his brother in Christ, (as we learn from 1st Cor. 6: 1-8). "Dare any of you having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?"

Another Application?

A final comment should probably mention that some bible students believe that Matt. 5: 25, 26 has a figurative application, apart from the obvious lesson, and that God is the adversary with whom man must agree quickly, while man is in the way with God (i.e. while the opportunity lasts) lest man at the reckoning falls foul of the judge and pays the penalty.

Passing mention only is made of this interpretation as it is always possible to read too much into Jesus' words, as well as too little.

[Thank you for the questions to date. Supplementary questions to answers so far given and new questions are most welcome. Please address to James Gardiner, 83 Davidson Terrace, Haddington, East Lothian.]

METHODIST MINISTER TELLS WHY I RESIGNED

THE Rev. Roland Lamb, a Methodist minister for 27 years, announced yesterday his resignation from the ministry on doctrinal grounds. In particular, he said, he could not accept the refusal of the Methodist Conference to submit in practice to the supreme authority of Scripture.

Mr. Lamb is superintendent minister at Callington, Cornwall, and a son of the late Lord Rochester, a former Vice-President of the Methodist Conference.

Mr. Lamb said he knew of a number of Methodist ministers who had resigned recently on grounds similar to his own. They had not made public their resignations, however, because of an affirmation given early in their careers that should the position arise they would "go out quietly."

Personal Letter

In his case, he did not consider he had dishonourably broken faith with the Methodist Church because the Methodist Conference had broken faith with him and all who held to doctrinal standards which it had chosen to deny.

Mr. Lamb has published reasons for his resignation in a personal letter to members of his church. He says in this that the denial of Methodist doctrinal standards, especially that of the supreme authority of Scripture, are implicit in much of modern Methodism.

Methodist Sunday school and local preachers' courses do not unequivocally teach Biblical truths, and sometimes even deny them. What, by New Testament standards, are "worldly" methods are used in officially sponsored Methodist youth work, and in raising money for church funds. The practice of infant baptism is often indiscriminate, when the weight of New Testament evidence points to baptism being for believers, only, or possibly also for their children.

"Unscriptural Ecumenism"

He also objects to what he calls "the wholehearted support given by the Methodist Conference to a popular but unscriptural ecumenism." The recent interim report of the Anglican-Methodist Unity Commission commits Methodists to a reunited Church that from its inception will inevitably be unscripturally comprehensive in its doctrine, he says.

Mr. Lamb said last night that he had thought and prayed for nearly two years about the inevitable conflict that had arisen between loyalty to Christ and His Word, and loyalty to the Methodist Church.

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