

## 9: The Doctrine Of Non-Retaliatio

We have come now to the subject, The Doctrine of Non-Retaliatio. As we begin to explore this fascinating subject together, I want to ask you, have you ever had a nightmare? Some have spiritual nightmares; others have mental nightmares. Still others take a trip into dreamland! Regardless of what your departure might have been, you will find this chapter a thrilling one.

Notice with me, once again, seven great Bible facts:

1. Jesus is coming again! Hebrews 9:28, "...and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

2. He is coming for those who are like Him. I John 3:1-3, "...now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

3. Those who are like Jesus have learned not to retaliate. I Peter 2:21-23, "Who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:..."

4. This class of people will not murmur or dispute. Philippians 2:14-16, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world. Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain."

Did you ever stop to realize that murmuring and complaining could keep you out of heaven. That's just exactly what the verse says! We can be ever so faithful in tithe-paying or Sabbath-keeping or missionary work and any other kind of church involvement; but if we have complained and disputed throughout our sojourn here, the Lord will tell us we have laboured in vain. Do you begin to see how important it is that we understand this?

5. Why won't they do these things? John 19:10, 11 "Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above:"

Why it is when Jesus comes again there will be a people waiting to meet Him who will not be a retaliating people? When they are reviled, they will not revile again? They are not a complaining, murmuring people. Because they know that all the events that take place; all the circumstances that surround them are by God's divine permission, and no harm can come to them except as God allows it. The hand of the Almighty is watching over them and they trust His wisdom.

6. They know that God allows trials and tribulations to come, but for one purpose: to refine their characters. Isaiah 48:10, "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction."

John, the Revelator saw in vision that those who are with Jesus are, ". . . called, and chosen, and faithful." Revelation 17:14. The furnace of affliction is one of God's chosen ways to purify a people. But in the process of purification these people recognize that their wise and loving Father will allow only that which is necessary for their purification to come to them by trial and tribulation. They have learned to trust God for this by experience.

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7. Therefore, the only fight in which they will engage, is the fight of faith. I Timothy 6:12. "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life..."

"Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord...." Exodus 14:13

I wish I had learned these things when I was a boy - or in academy or college. I wish I had learned these things in my early ministry. I hope I have learned it by now! "But let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall..."

The following experience that I relate to you is only one of the many experiences I had in forging my way from nightmare to dreamland. I am sure that those of us who will enjoy the final Dreamland that Jesus has gone to prepare for us, will have gone through many nightmares. My favorite author mentions time and again that no individual will ever reach glory-land without first going through some almost crushing experiences. I have had a taste of some of these experiences, and I want to relate one of them to you. I will change some of the names and places to protect the innocent parties involved.

The experience revolved around the starting of a new church. The Lord had been very good to us in our ministry, as He had in several other places, and this necessitated the organization of a new church. I had some reluctance in promoting this venture, for through experience I had found that every time a new church is formed, ugly feelings seem to show themselves. Otherwise wonderful people show an attitude that is totally foreign. I had seen this happen time and again in many churches that I had had a part in organizing, and so I felt somewhat hesitant in starting this new church. But, the membership was enthusiastic and requested that a meeting be called at which this possibility could be fully explored.

I went to the meeting, hoping against hope that somehow this could be averted. We had a wonderful meeting. A vote was taken as to whether or not we ought to form a new church, and the vote was unanimous. It was very evident that the mind of the church was to organize a new group. They even suggested the number of charter members there should be for the new church. It was the biggest church I ever started - over 100 members. I wrote my brother and told him the size of this new church. He wrote back and said, "That church was born with its pants on!"

After the meeting was over, I walked away from our place of meeting and said to myself, "Satan must be dead. I've never started any new church in my life where there has been such a feeling of love and brotherhood." The feeling of unity was marvelous. Everything went along beautifully for a period of nine months. During that time the final touches were completed for the formation of this new church. We had over 100 members! These were fine people; dedicated to the work of the Lord.

I made my mistake in thinking the devil was dead. Just about the time everything was working out gloriously, five men - members of my church - for a reason I have not ever been fully able to understand, turned on me with an anger akin to that of a demon. These were the very men who originally initiated the organization of the new church. It was too late to retract our steps in the formation of this new church, and being a believer in the idea that once a work is begun, it should be completed, I determined to carry it through to completion. It was at this point that it seemed that all hell let loose in our midst.

These five men determined among themselves that the only thing to do to solve the problem was, to get rid of the pastor. To this end these men set themselves. They used every conceivable means to accomplish their task. I might say that there are some conferences where the membership have a great deal more to say about the hiring and dismissing of their ministers than others. These men felt that their weight unitedly might influence the president in their direction. To complicate matters, it was election year. The president was up for re-election or dismissal, according to the vote of the constituency. My church sent a delegation of two men to the conference president during the time

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camp was being pitched for camp meeting. They said, "We have come to tell you that you are to get rid of Elder Coon."

"Well," the president said, "election is just a few days away, I couldn't give you any assurance at this time. Why don't you come to see me after election?"

"That's just it," the men said, "we want to settle this before election."

"Oh, is that the way it is?" the president said. "You gentlemen can just be on your merry way, because I'm not going to be high-pressured into anything. I don't believe the Lord would have me operate that way." And with that he dismissed them.

Somehow word got back to me that these men had made an appearance and had had an appointment with the president requesting my dismissal. These things are hard to be kept absolutely quiet. I'll have to confess that it has always been hard for me to practice the doctrine of non-retaliation. How I wanted to go in and defend myself and show that I was being treated most unfairly, but I knew that it would be very difficult for me to do this without hurting someone else. I was frustrated and anxious; it was very difficult for me to stand still while all of this was going on.

This was just about the time my wife and I learned the secret and power of the A, B, C's of prayer. We had experienced marvelous answers to prayer by simply asking, believing and claiming Bible promises. We talked it over together and I determined that I was going to take a Bible promise and claim it in this situation, and that was all I was going to do about it. I chose Isaiah 54:17, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper: and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord"

In this promise I found my comfort and refuge. I read it and re-read it and realized that as long as the Lord wanted us in this particular church, we would be there, and no amount of pressure could change God's best plan. We determined not to run away from the situation. We agreed, too, that if God was through with us here, we were willing to leave. We were determined to have the right attitude and let God lead. We found comfort in the statement Jesus made to Pilate, too: "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above:..." When God would be through with us, He would see that we were moved; but until then we knew that no one could accomplish our move. We decided, too, that we were not going to talk to people about this problem; we would not seek sympathizers. We were determined to leave it all in the hands of a wise God.

I knelt, together with my wife, and putting my finger on the promise of Isaiah 54:17 asked God to do for us what He had promised. We claimed the promise and told the Lord that we appreciated His action in our behalf. We confessed our unworthiness and asked for grace and strength to meet the situation. There on our knees we put into practice the A, B, C's of prayer, and returned thanks to God that He was already working out the problems.

My wife shared with me the promise she had taken and was claiming. Acts 18:10, "For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee:...."

I thought this was a wonderful promise! This promise was given to Paul when he thought his work was finished, but he stayed in the very same place fully one year and six months after he was given this promise. We thrilled together in the provisions our Lord had made for us in this situation. We had the promises. We were not afraid of what might come. The Lord had promised; we believed His promises, and just waited and watched how the Lord would fulfill them. We had gone through our trial, but had found the answer. Now we were ready to be spectators and see the Lord's arm bared.

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Election time was coming in just a few days. Word got around that since the president of the conference would not subscribe to the plans of these men, they were now determined to see that he would not be re-elected to the presidency. They felt they had the force needed to accomplish their scheme. Again, I called on the Lord and claimed the promises of His word.

I realized that it was possible that I might be called to serve on one of the many committees during the constituency meeting. I determined that if I was placed on a committee, I would not say one derogatory word about a living soul. I would not try to seek revenge or vent my feelings in any way. I asked God for grace not to retaliate in any way, for I wanted to be like Jesus, Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again. I read and re-read I Peter 2:21-23 and determined I would act like Jesus. I would support the Cause and speak for positive programs, but not murmur or retaliate.

The time finally came. We assembled in the large auditorium. I was pastoring two churches at the time. The delegation from the one church sat in one pew; the delegation from the other church sat in another pew. I took charge of the one delegation and had one of the elders of the other church take charge of the other delegation. It was necessary for each church to choose one delegate to represent that church in the large committee. This large committee chooses all of the committees which in turn decide the future of the conference. I knew that the church over which I was presiding had everything cut-and-dried as to who their delegate was to be. I knew this, but I had made a decision that I was not going to revile against those who were scheming my ouster. They made their choice, and I asked for a motion and a second and their candidate was chosen. Unbeknownst to me, while we were choosing our delegate, the other church of which I was pastor had elected me to represent them on the large committee.

Here we were. I would represent the one church, and the man whom the other church nominated was the very man who had boasted that his group would eliminate both the conference president and me before the day was through. We went into the assembly hall and the first committee to be chosen was that committee which should choose the conference president. I sat there and listened and waited to see what would transpire. When the votes were tallied, there were more votes for me to be on that committee than for any other man. I wondered, 'how did this ever happen?' But before the tallying was over, the other man was put on the committee too!

The nominating committee now went to their quarters for the very important work of electing the president first of all. This other man was chosen as secretary of the committee. You can only imagine what was going through my mind and how the devil was attempting to have me show a spirit that was like his. But I prayed, "Lord, You have promised and I claim Your promise. Help me not to say an unkind word about a living soul." I had a little battle of my own right there, but God came and gave me strength and victory as I placed my will in His hands.

The chairman of the committee said, "Gentlemen, you have seen the work of our president over the last term of his office. His record is open to us all and we're well acquainted with what he has done. What is the pleasure of the committee? Who do you want as your president for the next two years?"

Within two minutes, the president was re-elected and re-instated in office. Within forty-five minutes the entire slate of officers was chosen. The man who acted as the secretary for the committee had been on the conference committee for the past two years, but in the newly-elected slate, his name was not even mentioned. He was completely out of the conference picture as far as influence was concerned. All of this was accomplished without a single derogatory word having been spoken by anyone. The work of the committee was taken back to the large delegation and it was voted within the hour.

These men then came back to the chairman of the committee and accused him of having rail-roaded the slate through. Why did they accuse him of doing this? The answer is found in Romans 2:1, "... thou that

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judgest another doest the same things." They had had their cut-and-dried scheme foiled; now they were accusing the chairman of doing the very thing they were attempting to do. The chairman confessed that he had had no plans whatever with regard to officers, and his conscience was clear that he had acted in good faith in harmony with the attitude of the committee.

In a few days camp meeting was over. We had had a good sitting together and the Lord had blessed that camp meeting with His special blessing. In a few days after the camp meeting was over, word came to me that these men were now setting their eyes on the up-coming General Conference at which time they were going to present my name to the General Conference president. I didn't know I was that important! Imagine, a delegation going to our world leader trying to get rid of a little man like me! Again my wife and I prayed together, each of us claiming the same Bible promises we had claimed under the previous time of stress. Again we determined that we would not say one word to anyone, but let this scheme take its course. We were ready again to stand and let the will of the Lord be revealed. We would not revile, or murmur. God had shown us His power once, and we were ready to look for it again. We were determined to fight only the fight of faith.

I began a program in my churches of conducting the Wednesday evening prayer meeting services as a teaching service. I was teaching my people the glorious truth of the A, B, C's of answered prayer! We had a Bible on a table right below the pulpit, and I invited people to come and put their finger on a promise that they wished to claim in harmony with the instruction given in Christ's Object Lessons page 147 and also in volume five of the Testimonies page 322. We had some wonderful prayer meetings. There were many who asked and believed and claimed the promises of God. Souls were converted in those mid-week services. God's Holy Spirit was present and gave evidence of His presence by the change in the lives of the members of that church.

In the meantime these men were in attendance at the General Conference. The new president was elected and these men sought him out. There in the main auditorium of that great session, they found him. They said, "Now that you're our new General Conference President, we have a request to make of you."

"What is it?" the president asked.

"We want you to get rid of Glenn Coon," they said. Then they proceeded to tell the president all about me and present their case.

While they were talking to the president, another member of my church, who was never very close to me, walked by and stopped to listen to what these men were saying. This man had great trouble sleeping that night. In fact during the night he got up and found out where the General Conference President was staying and he called him on the telephone. This man told the president that he just wanted to tell him that his church was blessed with a wonderful pastor. Then he went on to tell him some things about me that I didn't deserve. I don't know the exact words he used, but I know I am not, nor have I ever been good enough to deserve all of the nice things he said about me that night, to the General Conference President!

When the General Conference was over these men came back. Word soon got around that although they were foiled in their first attempt, this time it was going to be successful. "We'll get rid of him yet," they boasted. Again, when I felt the forces of evil pressing around me, I claimed Isaiah 54:17 and put my trust in the Lord, asking Him for guidance and understanding. I was determined to fight only one kind of fight; and I was determined it must be the fight of faith. I needed someone to turn to, and those of you who have been in the midst of a struggle of some kind, know that one needs help in a very special way during that kind of a struggle. I didn't want to turn to any other mortal, so I put my trust in One Whom I knew would never fail me or forsake me.

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I was unafraid, for God had given me peace of heart and mind, and you know, when you're at peace with God, it's not hard to be at peace with your fellow-man. I went right on with my plans. My schedule for the mid-week services was made out for several months at a time. I had advertising prepared which was posted in many places announcing the topics. One of the announced topics was on God's care of His own. It included a by-line to the effect that people better not attempt to foil God's plans or His program for His children. I was preaching these sermons, not for any present circumstances, but rather in preparing material for a book that I was writing. The night of the announced service came. The church was filled and God's Spirit was there. I'm sure He led in the choice of that topic. I spoke on what a serious thing it is to tamper with the plans of God and to set oneself to accomplish that which God had not designed should be.

We were enjoying the service when a man appeared at the door of the church. I could see him motion to me to come to him. I excused myself and went to the door. He said, "Would you please pray for brother so-and-so, he's deathly sick!" This was the very man who had set himself to see that I was to be removed. Just that morning I had called him on the telephone. I had heard that this brother was unhappy with me because I wasn't giving him enough opportunity to preach, and so I had asked him to preach in one of the two churches the next Sabbath. But when I called, I heard a very strange babble on the other end. I couldn't understand what he was saying, but finally he did manage to tell me 'no' to my request. Now he was on the brink of death.

Several weeks prior to this, a representative of the General Conference visited us in our community, presumably on vacation. But while in our town he visited each one of the men involved in the program to get rid of me. He visited every businessman of the church as well. He asked them all how things were going with themselves, their business and also the church. The report he got from the businessmen was glowing. Without exception, these men reported that the church was prospering and they were receiving bountiful blessings. However the five men gave a rather conflicting report. When he asked them about the church, they said everything was fine, excepting the pastor.

"What's wrong with the pastor?" the visitor asked. "Everything!" the five men said,

"Well, for instance? Give me an example," he said "For one thing," these men said, "he's a liar.

"A liar! That's a very serious charge. He wrote it down and then asked them to give him an example. They hummed and hawed, but failed to come up with a single example.

"But Elder," they said, "he lies about everything!" But search as they might, they found it impossible to give an example of a single incident.

"Something else perhaps?" the General Conference man asked.

"Yes," they said, "he doesn't cooperate."

"He doesn't cooperate," he said as he wrote that down on his pad. "Now if you will, give me an illustration of that charge, please."

"Why, Elder," they said, "he doesn't cooperate in anything." But they failed to come up with a single shred of proof or an incident substantiating their charge.

They had five charges, but were unable to give a single illustration. This convinced the representative of the General Conference that the charges were false. He turned to the men and said, "Gentlemen, your house is going to crumble unless you have a change of heart and attitude!" With that he excused himself and left.

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I had had many an opportunity to speak to this representative. I passed him on the street on several occasions. I knew where he was staying, but I determined with my wife that I was not once going to speak to him or endeavor to defend my cause. I was going to put my trust in God and let Him lead in the whole situation.

These five men were united in a business venture. They had formed a corporation. One of the men said, "In the light of what the General Conference representative has said, I believe I'm wrong and with God's help I plan to change my attitude. If you men continue to hold to your purpose, I'm afraid I'm going to have to resign from the group." He was joined by another member of the group who made the same kind of declaration of intention. The chairman just looked at them. Between that time and the next night this man was stricken with this terrible malady, and now lay at the point of death.

I went back to the pulpit and told the congregation about the plight of the man and we prayed most earnestly together that if it might be God's will, to save him and spare his life. I hadn't known of this man's physical problem when I called him, inviting him to preach. In the meantime I had asked another of the five to preach, and he accepted the appointment. His message was a message calling for unity of action and a challenge to full cooperation in the entire program. This man had had an entire transformation of attitude. And you can imagine he would, for the brother who was so sick, and for whom we prayed, suffered terribly. It put the fear of the Lord into that group, let me tell you!

We continued our program there with the Lord's blessing until our work was finished. Then, and not until then, did we move from that church. In this experience we had demonstrated to us the mighty power of God. It helped us to see that when inequities seem to come our way, it is not our responsibility to murmur or complain; it is not our responsibility to retaliate. God has promised to take care of His own, and if we will claim the promise, He will perform miracles in our behalf. God cannot lie; let us trust Him and be witnesses to His power and grace. When Jesus comes, may He find in us a people who are like Him, in spirit and in practice.