

War and Revenge

extract from Proposition XV § xiii

§ xiii. The sixth and last affirmation deals with revenge and war, which are an evil as contrary to the Spirit and doctrine of Christ as Light is to darkness. It is clear by what has already been said that, through contempt of Christ's law, the whole world is filled with oaths, cursings, blasphemous profanations, and horrid perjuries. Likewise, through contempt of the same law, the world is filled with violence, oppression, murders, ravishing of women and virgins, plunderings, depredations, burnings, devastations, and all kinds of lasciviousness and cruelty. It is strange that human beings, made after the Image of God, have degenerated so much that, rather than the image of rational creatures they bear the image and nature of roaring lions, tearing tigers, devouring wolves, and raging boars. Is it not even more remarkable that this horrid monster should find a place and be encouraged among people who declare that they are disciples of our peaceable Lord and Master Jesus Christ! He is called the Prince of Peace because he excels in peace, and he has explicitly prohibited his children from all violence, and on the contrary he has commanded them that, following his example, they should practice patience, charity, forbearance, and other virtues worthy of a Christian.

Listen to what this great Prophet says, whom every soul is commanded to hear under pain of being cut off: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist evil; whoever strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also. And if anyone sues you at the law and takes away your coat, let him have your cloak also. And if someone compels you to go a mile, go two miles with him. Give to anyone who asks you, and do not turn away from anyone who wants to

borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you to love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who treat you spitefully and persecute you. That way you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain to the just and the unjust. If you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you only greet your brothers, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do that? Therefore, be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:38 to the end of the chapter).

These words about revenge, like what was said before about swearing, forbid some things which were formerly lawful for the Jews, considering their condition and dispensation; but these words command for those who want to be disciples of Christ a more perfect, eminent, and full meaning of charity, patience and suffering than was required of the Jews in that time, condition, and dispensation by the Law of Moses. This is the judgment of most, if not all of the ancient Fathers, so-called, of the first three hundred years after Christ, and also of many others, and in general of all those who have rightly understood and taught the law of Christ concerning swearing. . . .

It is clear that there is a great connection between these two precepts of Christ; as they were spoken and commanded by him at one and the same time, so in the same way they were received by people of all times, not only in the first preaching by the small number of the disciples, but also after the Christians increased in the first three hundred years. Also in the apostasy the one was not left and rejected without the other being rejected as well. Now again in the restitution and renewed preaching of the eternal Gospel they are acknowledged as eternal and unchangeable laws, properly belonging to the evangelical

condition and its perfection. If anyone withdraws from that condition, he falls short of the perfection of a Christian.

Truly, the words are so clear in themselves that in my opinion they do not need any examples to explain their meaning. It would be easier to reconcile the greatest contradictions than to reconcile these laws of our Lord Jesus Christ with the wicked practice of wars, for they are plainly inconsistent. Whoever can reconcile “Do not resist evil” with “Resist violence by force”; or again “Give the other cheek” with “strike back”; or “Love your enemies” with “Plunder them, make a prey of them, pursue them with fire and sword”; or “pray for those who persecute you and those who slander you” with “persecute them by fines, imprisonments, and death itself, do this not only to those who don’t persecute you but also to those who heartily desire and seek your eternal and temporal welfare” — whoever can find a means to reconcile these things must also have found a way to reconcile God with the devil, Christ with Antichrist, Light with darkness, and good with evil. But if this is impossible, and indeed it is impossible, the other will be impossible also, and people deceive themselves and others when they boldly try to establish such absurd and impossible things.

Sources: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition XV § xiii (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 466-469 and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 362-364.