

**AN OPEN LETTER TO THE CFC-FFL FAMILY
FROM THE SERVANT GENERAL**

“OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD”

June 19, 2008

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Peace and joy always!

We are in continuing spiritual warfare. Indeed, we will be in spiritual warfare for the rest of our days, as long as we serve Jesus the King and work in his vineyard.

In our life and service, expect that there will be trials and crosses, for that is what God allows in order to purify and strengthen us. At times, such trials will be severe, even coming from friends and brethren. You can be maligned, lied about, slandered, snubbed, ridiculed, insulted, spoken against in anger, judged, maltreated, oppressed, persecuted, and attacked. If these happen even as you conduct yourself in conformity with God's will, then rejoice and be glad! (Mt 5:10-12).

Paul tells us that our struggle is not against humans but against evil spirits. We are to put on God's armor, resist and stand fast. We do so with truth and with righteousness (Eph 6:14). We should always speak the truth and act in truth. And we should be blameless in our ways, always striving to grow in holiness. Righteousness is our breastplate. It protects our heart. Jesus did say that many evils come from within people, from their hearts (Mk 7:21-23). On the other hand, one produces good out of the store of goodness in his heart (Lk 6:45).

What is our proper posture in light of the above and in the circumstances we face now? I take you to the wisdom of Sirach.

“The vengeful will suffer the Lord's vengeance, for he remembers their sins in detail. Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven. Should a man nourish anger against his fellows and expect healing from the Lord? Should a man refuse mercy to his fellows, yet seek pardon for his own sins? If he who is but flesh cherishes wrath, who will forgive his sins? Remember your last days, set enmity aside; remember death and decay, and cease from sin! Think of the commandments, hate not your neighbor; of the Most High's covenant, and overlook faults.” (Sir 28:1-7)

There is a lot of wisdom here, certainly very different from worldly wisdom. What is God teaching us?

First, do not retaliate or respond in kind. Do not seek vengeance. Leave that to God's justice. "Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" (Rom 12:19). In fact, go further. "Rather, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.' Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good." (Rom 12:20-21). Always continue to look on those who oppose or persecute us as still our brethren.

Second, live out the above basic posture in practical ways.

- Forgive even injustice.
- Do not nourish anger.
- Do not refuse mercy to another.
- Do not cherish wrath.
- Set enmity aside.
- Cease from sin.
- Hate not your neighbor.
- Overlook faults.

Third, always remember that we relate to others in the way God relates to us. That is why we love others, because God first loved us, even when we were sinners. Jesus gave his life for his enemies. We are called to follow in his path. When we do the above, wonderful things happen.

- When we pray, our own sins will be forgiven.
- We can expect healing from the Lord.
- We can seek pardon for our sins.

Fourth, to keep us focused on doing what is right, God reminds us of certain realities.

- We are "but flesh." We do sin, just as others do. We ought to empathize with the weakness and humanity of others, having experienced these ourselves. Rather than condemning them, we pray for them.
- We face our "last days." We are just passing through this world as pilgrims. Our true home is in heaven with our Father. Sin can keep us from our heavenly home. We can miss out on our eternal reward. We should therefore not allow the injustice that others do to us to cause us to sin. We look beyond the suffering of the present moment, keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, and look to the glory of eternal salvation.
- We think of God's "commandments." God gave us His law in order to keep us on the right path in making our way to heaven. God tells us to love and not hate our neighbor. So that is what we do, even if our neighbor hates us.
- We look to our "covenant" with God. We as Christians are a privileged people. God has entered into covenant with us. He is our God and we are His people. In addition, we have a covenant with God as CFC-FFL. We are privileged to be used by Him to bring His salvation to the world. We need to focus on the larger picture and thus not be bogged down by the faults of others.

I advise you all not to respond to anonymous emails or to blogs that attack us. Just say a prayer for those involved. While we may have to share the truth once in a while, we should do so not in an adversarial mode but rather in love, hoping that the truth will set people free (Jn 8:32).

I leave you with Sirach's final word.

“Avoid strife and your sins will be fewer, for a quarrelsome man kindles disputes, commits the sin of disrupting friendship and sows discord among those at peace.” (Sir 28:8-9)

Be at peace. Be peacemakers.

Once again, the peace and joy of the Lord be with you. God bless you all.

Your brother and servant,

Frank Padilla