

# Female Piety: Its Character and Influence

---

ROBERT FLEMING, Principal of Newnan Female Seminary, Ga.  
From the book, *The Baptist Preacher*, Volume III, 1844, Henry Keeling, Ed.

*"And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there. And she constrained us." Acts 16: 13-15.*

One of the peculiar features of the religion of Jesus Christ is its transforming influence upon the heart. The systems of religion devised by men, have not only found the heart sinful, but they have been incapable of changing it. However prone mankind may be to boast of their wisdom, it remains a forever settled point, that the world by wisdom, knows not God; and how much soever they may boast of the openness of the heart to the reception of truth, still they are met with this silencing fact, that "the Lord opened Lydia's heart."

The heart must be opened for the reception of the revealed word, or the kingdom of heaven will be closed against us in the coming day. Yea verily, "Except we be converted and become as little children we cannot see the kingdom of heaven." Submission to the will of God, and a reverential regard to his commands, are essential attributes of the child of grace, and they afford the strongest proof that we are converted, —that we are renewed in the spirit of our mind, — that our heart is opened.

The Holy Spirit is the instrument by which this transformation is produced. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us." It is, therefore, the work of the Spirit,

"To pour fresh life in every part  
And new create the whole."

It is not by baptism that we are made children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven; but, by the Holy Spirit of God we are sealed unto the day of redemption. No other seal than that which God sets upon the heart can make it meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. Where this seal is set upon the heart, it becomes a heart of flesh—a feeling, tender heart,—a heart susceptible of holy impressions. The fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

These general remarks respecting conversion are applicable to all the subjects of it, without distinction of sex; but this discourse invites attention to the consideration:

1. of piety as exhibited in the female character; and
2. of the influence which pious females exert over others.

**1. Of piety as exhibited in the female character.**

Females, generally, are constitutionally qualified to discharge with more efficiency, the more delicate and tender offices of life, than the other sex. This is apparent from Scripture, and from facts. The feebleness of woman's physical powers, the delicacy of her mind, the tenderness of her heart, and the ardency of her attachments, all indicate that she is designed by the Creator to be "an help meet for man,"—an auxiliary,—a co-operator with him, in the various duties adapted to her powers.

That the Creator designed the man "to bear the rougher part and mitigate, by nameless gentle offices her toil," is not debatable. Nor is it intended here to discuss the claims to superiority in the one sex, nor to attempt to show the inferiority of the other. It is the glory of the female character, as well as our pleasure to know, that she is more sympathetic, more easily moved by the tear of suffering humanity, and less inclined to enter with unyielding purpose into the stern and unholy work of cruelty and oppression than our own sex. If then she is naturally more lovely in her general character, what is she when her heart is opened and purified by the soul-softening influence of the Holy Spirit?

Lydia, the female mentioned in our text, whose heart the Lord opened, and whose short history is found in this chapter, was a worshipper of God previously to Paul's preaching to her the gospel. He found her, on the Sabbath day, withdrawn from the bustle of the city of Philippi, by a river side where prayer was wont to be made. He spoke unto her the word of truth, and the Lord opened her heart and "she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul."

To open the heart - to convert - is the work of the Lord. To attend unto the things which are spoken is the evidence—the work of the believer. The sacraments, then, do not appear to be essential to salvation; but an observance of them, appears to be essential to an exhibition of Christian faith and obedience.

Lydia was the first convert of whom we have any account in this city. How did the religion of Jesus Christ appear in her character? It wasn't displayed in mere profession, nor in unmeaning pomp and noise, but in the simple fact that "she attended unto the things" which were spoken by Paul. She became a "doer of the word." Her love to the Redeemer was made known by her obedience to his word and her love to his servants. It was now altogether congenial with her feelings, and perfectly in her line of things to show them much kindness.

It is remarkable in this instance, as well as in all others where the Lord opens the heart, that he opens the house and the purse of the individual. And although the religion of Christ makes its subjects ardent and sincere in their attachment to God's people generally and to his ministers especially, yet it does not make them immodest nor vainly ostentatious in the exhibition of their piety.

Such was Lydia's attachment to these "messengers of the Lord of hosts" that, when she was baptized and her household, she besought them saying, "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there." And she constrained them. Converted persons delight in the society of pious persons. She took pleasure in the company, the conversation, the instructions, and, (more than all) in the prayers of these holy men in her family. The hospitalities of her house were freely tendered to them; yea, she constrained them, to accept of the temporal comforts with which Divine providence had blest her, and that too, during the whole of their stay in Philippi.

Perfectly aware of the ardency of her feelings, and of the strong terms in which they were communicated, she seems to have become fearful lest the Apostles might deem it imprudent to take lodgings at the house of a strange

female, of whose character they had had so little knowledge. But she seems to anticipate their objections by prefixing the condition, "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord." There is always safety where there is faithfulness to the Lord. I will be faithful to you,—my house is open,—it is free,—I am able,—I am willing,—I am anxious to have you with me.

In all ages of the world, and among all nations, public sentiment has had a powerful influence on the actions of mankind; but where it is not regulated by the principles of the Bible, it needs correction. Probably, with us, it needs correction, respecting the liberties and privileges which it allows to females generally, and to religious females particularly.

While the female heart glows with love to God, his cause and his people, there appears to be a disposition (with some minds at least) if not to close, at least not to open the channels through which they may be able to bring into lively and profitable exercise the graces of the Holy Spirit.

And while our sex have claimed superiority of intellectual powers, they have also, apparently, arrogantly said, that woman in point of piety is inferior to man, and should have little to do, and less to say in religion. But we learn from our text a different lesson. We see the influence of the grace of God on the heart of a female at Philippi, where the Gospel had never previously been preached. We see her immediately attending to the command of God, and giving vent to the holy, heaven-wrought feelings of her heart, in constraining the Apostles to make her house their welcome residence during their continuance in the city.

Paul found Lydia, out of the city, by a river side, where it was usual for prayer to be made on the Sabbath. She was among the women who resorted thither. It is probable she was a Jewess who worshipped God according to the requisition of the law. She had not heard of Jesus, or if she had, she had not embraced the Gospel. But now the Lord opened her heart and converted her and her household. She had come from Thyatira to Philippi to trade, but she and her family attended to the worship of God on the Sabbath, according to the knowledge they had of his worship.

It were devoutly to be wished that the men who merchandize our town and cities would follow her example - would attend the worship of God themselves on the Sabbath, and take their families with them. This was what the world terms a business woman. She was now what the Scriptures require all Christians to be - "diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Idleness and gossiping at any time, but especially on the Sabbath, are incompatible with the religion of the Bible; and whenever women or men, (no matter what may be their wealth,) would excuse themselves from the obligation to pursue some honest and useful employment that might benefit themselves and others, they are wanting in piety, are at war with the designs of heaven, and subject themselves to the reproof of all who love our Lord Jesus Christ. "No man liveth unto himself" should be deeply and indelibly impressed on every human heart. All are to be laborers, and none loiterers, in the vineyard of the Lord. Of them to whom much is given, much will be required.

Christians were there to receive him but he found that the same Lord, who had opened other hearts at other places, was ready to open Lydia's heart for his reception. The Christian minister ever finds a home in that house where the word of the Lord finds a place in the heart of its possessor. Christianity is the same in all ages of the world,—"good will to men"— "to do good and to communicate." Eighteen hundred years ago, in the heart of Lydia of Thyatira, it was seen and known by its fruits.

The same spirit is found in the heart of every converted female in this community today; and by their fruits Christians are known now, as they were then. Lydia's kindness towards the Apostles endeared her to them, and fully convinced them that they were altogether welcome to a liberal participation in the hospitalities of her house. Be not surprised if the minister should most frequently call at the residence of those whose piety is so well authenticated, and whose constraining entreaties are something more than hollow-hearted formality, or sounding brass or tinkling cymbal.

We have said that the pious conduct of this distinguished individual was such as to secure the decided respect and confidence of the Apostles. In proof of this, we find them, as stated in the 40th verse of the chapter, visiting her house, as soon as they were liberated from prison, and comforting the brethren who composed her household, and who had been so recently baptized. The pre-eminence of her piety is very conspicuous in this instance; for though Paul had been seized by an infuriated mob, dragged before the magistrates of the city, scourged, derided, and imprisoned, still she stands fast in the faith, and in her vindication of him as a minister of the Gospel.

This was a trying time with her and with him; for there was nothing in the popularity of Paul, nor of his religion, at this time in this city, which could induce sycophantic fawning. It is too commonly the policy of carnal spirits to avoid responsibility, and to endeavor to give importance and influence to themselves, by hanging to the skirts of those whom fame with her silvery, though deceitful trumpet has already proclaimed to be wise, and great, and grand. No such unholy motive could have given rise to the conduct of this woman. Nor could the fear of detracting from her own reputation, by espousing the cause of this despised, persecuted and unpopular minister, deter her (though a stranger in the city herself and equally exposed to danger) from the discharge of her duty towards him.

It is human nature to shrink from receiving instruction from those who, in public estimation, are degraded and unpopular; and it is too often the case that public estimation is made the "sine qua non" [Latin for "without which there"] of merit. But the grace of God so reigned in the heart of the prison; he found a hearty welcome at her house, and his pious instructions still fell like the mellow tones of music upon the ears of the brethren there, and filled their desponding spirits with comfort. In the holy consolations of spirit-born souls, they dream not of worldly policy nor of fleshly prudence. Here is manifested exalted piety. It is not the easiest part of Christian duty to follow Christ when our reputation, our person, our property, and our life are endangered by it.

But instances of piety, of a high order among females are not isolated and few:

**MARTHA AND MARY** were the intimate personal friends of Christ. Lydia evinced her love to Christ by her love to his Apostles; but these two amiable sisters had the peculiar honor of entertaining Christ himself under their humble roof. They saw his sympathies as a man when he approached the tomb of their deceased brother Lazarus and wept; but they beheld his power, as "the mighty God," when he cried, "Lazarus come forth." These sisters and their brother lived in a retired situation, and Jesus often visited them. Retirement is favorable to visits from Jesus. Piety is apt to wither in the sickly atmosphere of the busy, thoughtless world.

**MARY MAGDALENE** out of whom Jesus cast seven devils, came to Jesus as he sat at meat at Simon's house, and washed his feet with tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head, anointing them with precious ointment. What a display of ardent love and deep humility of soul! Simon, a Pharisee, finds fault, but Jesus commends her. The religious zeal and pious labors of females in our own day have too often to endure the sulky frowns of some of Simon's kindred spirits.

**DORCAS** a disciple, who resided at Joppa, was a woman full of good works and alms deeds which she did. She sickened and died. Peter was at a neighboring city and was sent for. When he came they conducted him into an upper chamber where she was laid, and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which she made while she was with them. She was benevolent, and was lamented in death by all the "saints and widows." Religion and benevolence are but other names for love to God and man. They are twin sisters, going hand-in-hand, ministering to the wants of the widow and the fatherless.

**RUTH** the Moabitess daughter-in-law of Naomi, and whose prophetic history furnishes a beautiful specimen of piety in the female heart, may be profitably mentioned here. After the death of her husband and two sons, Naomi was disposed to return from the land of Moab to Bethlehem Judah, the place of her nativity and the land of her kindred. As she was taking leave of her daughters-in-law, she pronounces, in the spirit of true piety, her parting benediction upon them. "The Lord deal kindly with you as ye have dealt with the dead and turn to Moab," but Ruth said to her Mother-in-law; Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God ;

where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.”

We might here introduce with much propriety the name of **DEBORAH**, the wife of Lipidoth, a prophetess who judged Israel after the death of Ehud; and who led the army of Israel under Barak to successful combat with the army of Jabin king of Canaan, whose army was commanded by Sisera. “The Lord sold Sisera and his host into the hand of a woman. She not only judged Israel, but she planned the battle for Barak, and went up with him to Kedish, the field of action, and directed the onset. After this signal conquest, she sang a song of praise to God, ascribing all the glory and honor to him. In all this there is an exhibition of elevated piety, as well as a display of superior mental endowment.

We might mention the names of many other women, whose holy lives are recorded in the word of God for the benefit of succeeding generations. We might speak of Sarah, the mother of Isaac,—of Hannah, the mother of Samuel,—of Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist,—of Mary, the mother of Jesus. But time would not permit us to dwell. It is recorded to the imperishable honor of woman, that she was last at the cross and first at the sepulchre of Christ,—last to witness his dying agony, and first to proclaim his triumphant resurrection. We are to consider:

## **II. THE INFLUENCE WHICH PIOUS FEMALES EXERT OVER OTHERS.**

It is not intended here to speak of the influence which pious females exercise over their own sex alone, but over all classes, of both sexes. The wise, energetic, pious woman occupies a distinguished place in the history of our species, as given in the Holy Scriptures. Woman was created to be “an help meet for man;” and she has proven herself not unworthy the design of her Creator. With a heart and head regulated by correct feelings and principles, she is not improperly styled, “Heaven’s first best gift to man;” or to use the more impressive language of holy writ, “Her price is far above rubies.”

Let us consider:

### **1. Her influence in the family as a wife.**

That she who is “bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh” should have a greater influence over us than anyone else is a point settled by the Word of God. “Wherefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and cleave unto his wife.” Son to his kind father and amiable mother are loose when compared with those which now bind him to the wife of his virtuous choice. It is true; he does not cease to love his father and mother, but he loves his wife more. This is one of the laws of heaven, stamped upon our existence for purposes wise and good. Thus the affections of the son and his wife (as they do not flow back to the parent) are concentrated and thrown forward upon each other and upon their mutual offspring, from age to age, through all coming time.

The husband is destined to feel the influence of his wife either for weal or for woe. The inspired penman has written, “It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman.” But it is again written, “The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife,” the believing wife. Who can estimate the amount of holy influence which the prayers and godly conversation of a Christian wife may have over her impenitent husband? God has said, “It is not good that man should be alone.” The wife was not created merely to help him make money,—to help him decorate the frail body which is so soon to fall a prey to the greedy worms of the grave.

No more valuable purposes were to be accomplished in bestowing upon man an help meet. She is eminently qualified, by piety, to help him make his calling and his election sure. What pious husband, who is blest with an intelligently pious wife, has not felt the force of this declaration? How pleasant the family altar, where hearts united in fearing the Lord, meet to implore his blessing upon their undying spirits The Almighty himself has fixed, unchangeably, a price upon the virtuous, sensible, pious woman.

We repeat it. "Her price is far above rubies." The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her. "She will do him good and not evil, all the days of her life." "She will do him good," —it will not be an attempt followed by a failure. The man who can lightly esteem such a woman offers insult to the God that made him. And he, who makes piety a secondary consideration in the selection of a wife, makes religion a secondary object in his own soul. Such an individual seems to say, "Give me a wife with a plenty of money and money's pleasures; and religion and religious pleasures you may give to the winds."

It sometimes occurs that the wife is religious and the husband an unbeliever. How can she exercise, to the best advantage, an influence over him? She may do this by her pious deportment; but there is nothing in the word of God, nor in the feelings of a kind husband, which forbids her praying in his presence in the family.

But the devotions of the Christian husband are aided by the—the need of spiritual help. How seasonable! How pleasant are the prayers of the wife on such occasions at the family altar! Again, he may be confined to his chamber on a bed of affliction. Who can come around his pillow—who can offer supplication so sincere, so moving, and so availing, as the wife whose holy life has been to him a crown of rejoicing in his healthful days!

## **2. Her influence as a mother.**

Just so certain as God designed woman to be a mother, so certainly did he design she should be instrumental in moulding, properly, the mind and morals of her infant offspring. It is painful for us to know that a few, (though very few,) professedly Christian parents have thought it improper to teach children the Scriptures, from a supposed incapacity, on the part of the child, to understand religious truths. But we would seriously ask, "What are the Scripture examples and precepts on this subject?"

Have we forgotten that when God gave the law to the Israelites, he required of parents that his holy commandments should be observed by them and their children after them? Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up...And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, what mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God commanded you? Then shalt thou say, we were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt." Deut. 6:7, 20. By this quotation we prove clearly the importance of religiously instructing children, in childhood, that when they shall ask us, in riper years, what these things mean, we may be able to give that explanation which the Holy Spirit may sanctify to their souls' salvation.

But some may say, this obligation belonged to the Jewish dispensation, and is not binding upon us in the gospel day. We reply—what has Paul said to Timothy, his son in the gospel? He exhorted him to continue in the things which he had LEARNED and been assured of, "knowing of whom thou has learned them, and that from a CHILD thou hast known the holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." II Tim. 3: 14, 15

Timothy's mother was a Jewess, and his father a Greek. (Acts 16:1) His grandmother, Lois, was a believer; and his mother Eunice had taught him the Scriptures from a child. All we know of his father is that he was a Greek —not a word is said of him as a believer: But the female ancestry of Timothy is mentioned by Paul, with pleasing recollections. He rejoiced that Timothy had been blest with a pious mother and grandmother. What an inestimable blessing! Some of us have mothers dead and in glory. The many times they kneeled with us to pray with us to pray for the blessing of God upon our infant souls are fresh upon the tablet of our memory. To some of us it is the most pleasing recollection of our life to know that our infantile years were nurtured in the bosom of maternal piety.

Mothers, you have religious duties to discharge towards your children, which you cannot neglect without the frowns of God coming upon you. Follow them by your prayers, your tears and a holy life. Teach them to pray, —teach them to read the holy Bible,—teach them to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy;—teach them to attend the Church and be sober,—teach them to live peaceably with others,—teach them to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly before God all their days,—let your fire-side circle be itself A SABBATH SCHOOL AND A BIBLE—CLASS.

Say to them, as did the Psalmist, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me and I will teach you the fear of the Lord." How delightful to behold a father and mother united, heart and hand, in training up the objects of their mutual love in the way they should go. How pleasant it is to spend a Sabbath-eve with such a family! All is order, peace and happiness. The father, mother, sons, daughters and servants are all cheerful under the influence of a well-regulated religious discipline. Oh how delightful is that dwelling place where all the members of the household meet, To sing the praises of Almighty grace and bow with reverence at the mercy-seat!"

How unlike this, is that family where there is no uniformity, no fixedness of purpose, in these matters! Religious duties in such a family are a task, and the public services of the Church a burden to them.

Are you a widowed mother? Your husband has been accustomed to gather his family together to invoke heaven's blessing upon them. He is dead. How silent! How solitary and desolate the house, under any circumstances, compared with what it was! Evening comes, and the hour of prayer comes, but no song of praise is heard,—no sound of prayer falls upon the ear of the sorrowing orphans. Lonesomeness and gloom reign throughout the desolate mansion. The children, unused to such a state, seem to sigh for the accustomed prayer. Mother of these helpless sorrowers - shall they sigh in vain?

In the providence of God they are thrown alone upon your arm for temporal and eternal aid. O will you not arise and look to the God of the widow and the fatherless for help? "Who will pray for me now?" said a child to its father, "since mother is dead?" The father had lived without prayer, and the child had never heard him pray; but the question made such an impression upon his heart that he rested not until he found peace with God in prayer. "Mother, who will pray for us now father is dead?" is a question which, we fear, might be asked by the children of too many bereaved pious females. But how can you, Christian mothers, neglect this duty towards your children? God has promised to bless you and them.

"...will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever; for the good of them and their children after them. Jer. 32: 39.

We have a model of female excellence given in the 31st chapter of Proverbs, which it would be unpardonable to pass unnoticed in this discourse. "She opens her mouth in wisdom and her lips are the law of kindness." "She eats not the bread of idleness—her children rise up and call her blessed, her husband also, and he praiseth her."

Truly blessed are the children of such a mother; and blest is the husband of such a wife; for when he shall leave her by death, he shall feel that his God is the God of the orphan children and their widowed mother. Let every female who would fill her station to the glory of God, and who would learn the true science of being happy, amiable and useful, imitate the example of this wife, mother and mistress.

### **3. Her influence as mistress in the family.**

She should pray with her household, especially in the absence of her husband. Prayers should not be suspended in the absence of the praying husband. She should read the Scriptures, pray with them, and talk to them daily on the subject of religion. All her demeanor should disclose to them retire with her family to the 4 place where prayer is wont to be made,"—to the Church,—to the prayer meeting. Can we not readily perceive the hand of God in the conversion of Lydia's household through her instrumentality? May we not look back from young Timothy to his mother Eunice, and still back to his grandmother Lois and find the remote instrumentality of his conversion to the Christian faith? Cannot some of us go back to the days of unpolled childhood, when we were taught to lisp at a mother's knee, "Our father who art in heaven," and there date the first whisperings of that still small voice which brought us to the fold of God?

**4. Her influence in the Church among her female friends.**

There is power in a holy life, which disarms infidelity itself. And if infidelity is more abhorrent in one class than another, it surely is in that of females. One writer asserts that “a female infidel is a monster in human form.” But the pious female in going into the circle of the sisterhood will not encounter such monsters. There she will meet with kindred spirits. There by a holy life, she will kindle a holy fire which will consume envy, hatred, malice, and all the kindred train of evil. She may converse freely on the subject of religion—may unite in prayer with and for them, and thus shed around her an influence which will animate, strengthen and encourage those of her own sex, and diffuse a heavenly radiance over the whole brotherhood. But consider,

**5. Her influence among the brethren.**

By an intelligent and well regulated zeal, she may give life and energy to the services of God’s house. The minister himself, while he has indubitable evidence that her heart is lifted up in prayer for him, feels her influence as he breaks to the people the bread of life. When he rises in the sacred desk to enter upon the duties of his high calling, and casts his eye over the assembly, and beholds even one whose prayers he knows are ascending to heaven for a blessing on his labors, he thanks God and takes courage,—is strong in the Lord and the power of his might, and feels that he is not working single-handed in the vineyard of his Divine Master.

Paul acknowledges the help of some of the devout sisterhood of the Philippian Church. “I entreat thee also, true yoke-fellow, help those women which labored with me in the gospel.” What those labors were, we are not informed. It must have been in prayer, and deeds of charity and benevolence, that they labored with him; for he did not permit women to preach.

The Sabbath school opens a delightful field of labor for pious females. In this they may co-operate with the brethren, and be efficient laborers with the minister in teaching transgressors the way of the Lord. Who can estimate the amount of good this modern enterprise has already accomplished? It has thrown light and life into the abodes of darkness and death,—has waked up the slumbering energies of the Christian world,—is driving before it the clouds of ignorance and superstition, by pouring into the youthful mind the wholesome, simple truths of God’s Book.

Every Church should be a Sabbath school, and all the brethren and sisters should, to the utmost of their ability and opportunity, foster and sustain the glorious enterprise. Baptists, as they have ever claimed the Bible as their only “rule of faith and practice,” and have acknowledged no other book of doctrine and discipline, should be foremost in the labors of this blessed institution.

**6. Her influence on the world.**

Humanity depraved is so poor a thing, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to say what it will not do. Some of our own sex have such a poor, not to say contemptible, opinion of female intellectuality, as to intimate that all the weaker vessels are to be found only among the other sex. It would be a blessing to the world if it were so; but so it is not.

Weakness has not fallen upon the daughters of Eve alone. That disposition, which leads any of our sex to smile with self-complacency at the claims set up in behalf of female worth, may be adduced as proof; and may, very properly, be referred back for its paternity to a more barbarous and less enlightened age, than the one in which it is our happy privilege to live.

It is certain that the illiberal abuse poured upon the female sex is founded in ignorance and folly. The truly sensible and well informed entertain far better, and far more just sentiments, in relation to female utility and importance in the scale of being; and are ever disposed to ascribe to female capacity and worth, more than female modesty and wisdom are disposed to assume or even receive. No good man has ever wished to see the female character undervalued or degraded; and perhaps very few good women have ever violently coveted stations and



employments which belong peculiarly to men. The rivalry and competition of the sexes are altogether ridiculous and absurd. Each has its distinct dignity and influence, and mutual concession is the truest wisdom in the one and the other.

Let us not conclude, then, that a pious lady is going beyond the appropriate sphere of her action, when she carries with her into the world the religion of Christ—that religion which throws a charm around her by giving softness, gentleness and ease, to her manners; and which makes her firm, without stubbornness; serious, without sadness; lively, without levity; and lovely, without dissimulation: that religion, emphatically, which enables her, in all her associations with the world, “To tread low-thoughted vice beneath the foot, And soar above this lithe scene of things.”

In the circles of her own sex especially, an intelligently pious woman may be eminently successful in assisting and encouraging those who are serious and inclined to unite with the Church. “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver” —no matter if a woman should speak it. It may be sanctified to the spiritual peace of the enquiring soul, and it may dispose the halting convert to halt no more. The woman at the well of Samaria, when she heard the Son of God, ran off in all the raptures of a heaven-born spirit, leaving her water pot and telling the people of her delightful interview—“Is not this the Christ?” Many of the inhabitants of the village believed on him, because of the words which she spoke.”

What a blessed privilege! to speak of Jesus and be owned as an instrument in the salvation of others! Woman may, and should speak of the goodness of God, It is no mark of piety in a woman, (or man either) to be dumb, on the subject of religion. For a lay to be able to speak with a kind of enthusiastic fluency in relation to her flower-garden and to be lifeless and speechless when the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the valley” is the theme, is a reproach to her Christian character. For the toilet-table of her apartment, or the center-table of her parlor, to be loaded with the books of fiction, or the pamphlets of fashion, and be destitute of the Bible and of religious periodicals, is a reproach,—a shameful reproach,—to her, head and her heart.

“Religion never was designed to make our comforts less.” Genuine piety does not make its subject gloomy, harsh, or impolite in the society of others. It dignifies, ennobles and elevates the character, and gives to the feelings a tenderness and sweetness which ever render its possessor more lovely to all. How easily, then, may the pious lady approach unconverted females, and, with the tenderness and kindness characteristic of her sex added to the sincerity and warmth of pious feeling, urge upon them the importance of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

That spiritual peace depends much on spiritual deportment and practice, is confirmed by the word of God and the experience of all his saints. Women and men who live lives of practical godliness enjoy most of the life and power of religion in their souls. “It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing.” It is good—for man or woman. But an eminently pious and zealous woman often appears to the eye of the sluggardly, frozen-hearted professor, like an enthusiast. Hence it not infrequently happens that some of our own delinquent sex are disposed to cry, “enthusiasm,”— “wild fire,”— “fanaticism”—“monomania,” and the like, when pious females are found ahead of them in holy living—when religion is the theme of their conversation, and the work of the Lord, the business of their lives.

This is doubtless one of the Devil’s weapons, put by him into the hands of such professors for their own unholy defence. Disposed, as too many of our own sex are, to undervalue the powers of the female mind, they feel perfectly justified in turning away with a sneer of contempt, believing that public sentiment (their only rule for determining right and wrong) will screen them from public odium. Indeed, it is to be regretted that it sometimes does. Though it may seem severe, yet we cannot forbear stating it as our decided opinion, that many of the male members of the Churches are not what pious females ought to be—fall far behind that attainment which religious females ought to be expected to make.

Though women are generally more pious and warm-hearted in the service of God than men; yet it is not to be doubted that the standard-of female piety is too low amongst us. It is probable that at this place, however, it is not

below that of corny others. But if the standard of female piety is too low, to what cause is it attributable? May we not fear that the cause may be found at our door? We are not what we should be.

Our standard is not occupying that high ground it should, and woman, (ever ready to shrink to the back-ground) has to occupy at a fearful distance from her true position. Who among you, brethren, pray daily in your families? Who among you daily read the Word of the Lord and bow before him at the family altar? No wonder then that our sisters so rarely do this, when it is so much neglected by those whose more immediate duty it is. While you have been remiss, and by your example encouraged others to be so, it is probable your pious wife, in her lonely hours of meditation, has said with a deep sigh from her heart a hundred times over, "If I were in my husband's place I would try to pray in the family."

Husband of that godly wife, will you not try to pray? Wife of that delinquent husband, will you not help him? You would most willingly lay your hand to any of his worldly interests to assist him, and surely you would not withhold in helping him to lay up treasure in heaven. Provide the candle, at night, and lay the books before him, and ask him once.

Probably this will be enough. It will, if he loves you, and his children, and his God, as he should. -What a delightful sight—a father, and his beloved wife and tender offspring, all on their knees, before the Lord their Maker, pleading for the bread of life! And who was instrumental in bringing him to the family altar?

You, THE WIFE OF HIS HOLY VOW. AMEN.



# Sin in the Church and What to do About It

---

E. L. Bynum

Available in Tract Form. Contact the Editor.

Text: I Corinthians 5:1-13

**T**he Church can exist in a world of sin, but it cannot prosper when a world of sin is brought into the Church. A ship in the water is fine, but water in the ship can be disastrous. The members of the Corinthian Church were busy in promoting divisions over human leadership, and boasting of their achievements. Yet in their very midst they tolerated sin of the vilest order. Paul's blistering words of rebuke should be studied and heeded by our 20th Century churches.

## I. SIN IN THE CHILD OF GOD

"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you . . ." I Cor. 5:1. One of the Corinthian Christians was deeply involved in sin with his step-mother. This type of fornication was so immoral that there was no name for it among the Gentiles.

Do not be deceived, any Christian can sin. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." I John 1:8, 10. If we boast of our holiness and our freedom from sin, we become an easy mark for the devil. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he stand eth take heed lest he fall." I Cor. 10:12.

Here is why it is easy for the Christian to sin:

(1) He still has the flesh. If there was no devil, the flesh would still crave sin. Read Romans 7. "Dearly beloved . . . abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." I Peter 2:11. ". . . Have no confidence in the flesh." Phil. 3:3. The flesh cannot be trusted.

(2) He is still in the world with all of its temptations. The world is no friend of God and no friend of the Christian.

(3) The devil is still running loose. He is not chained, but is the prince of the power of the air and the god of this world. He is the tempter. According to the scriptures, he has "wiles," "snares," and "devices." He has great power and is not afraid to use any of his weapons to lure a Christian into sin.

The Christian should recognize his own sin, confess it, repent of it, and forsake it. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." I John 1:9. If this is not done, the Christian will soon feel the chastening of the Lord. Read Hebrews 12: 5-11

God has provided a way of escape so that the Christian need not go into sin. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." I Cor. 10:13 Walk with God, avoid the very appearance of evil, seek His face in prayer, read and obey His Word, and you will find the key to victory over sin.

## II. SIN IN THE CHURCH OF GOD

"Unto the church of God which is at Corinth . . . It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you . . ." I Cor. 1:2a, 5:1a. Since a church is made up of individual members, sin in the individual constitutes sin in the church. The "church of God . . . at Corinth" was a local visible New Testament Church.

The Bible does not teach a universal invisible church, in fact there is no such thing today. In I Cor. 12:12-31 the local church with its various members is compared to a human body with its various parts. Every part of the human body has a use and function.

Even so, every member of a Church has a place of work and service that is needful. Disease or infection in one part of the human body has an adverse effect on the rest of the body. Even so, sin in one member of the Church has an adverse effect upon every member. "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it . . . Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." I Cor. 12:26-a, 27

One drop of contaminated water will contaminate a whole reservoir of pure water, but one drop of pure water will not purify a reservoir of contaminated water. One deadly cancer cell can be disastrous to an entire body of healthy cells "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." I Cor. 5:6 The Church at Corinth had a member who was openly involved in immorality. The Church had not mourned over this, nor had they taken any action at all.

This is the great problem in many churches to-day. Sin is tolerated. Sin is condoned. Sometimes sin is even promoted in the Church. Preachers, deacons, and prominent members are commonly reported to be guilty of fornication and adultery, and nothing is done about it. The Bible standards for the ministry and church officers are ignored in many quarters today. No wonder the world has lost all respect for the Church. No wonder God withdraws His blessing.

Eventually Ichabod is written over the door of another Church. "The glory is departed." I Sam. 4:21. Then that Church has to resort to worldly carnal methods to keep going.

God wants His Church to be doctrinally pure, and morally pure. In Joshua 7, we see how the sin of Achan brought defeat to the entire nation of Israel. When this sin was judged, then God restored the blessing.

### **III. DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH OF GOD**

Does a Church have the scriptural authority to deal with doctrinal error and immorality in the congregation? THE ANSWER IS YES!! The Church not only has the authority to do this, but it has the COMMAND of God to do so. Yet, we find many today who object to any form of discipline being exercised in the Church. Failure to exercise discipline against those guilty of doctrinal heresy has resulted in most of the major denominations being taken over by the modernists. If a Church fails to discipline those who are guilty of open immorality, they seal their own doom. The Church loses its testimony and the Spirit of God is grieved.

#### **Sin Should Be Condemned From the Pulpit**

Sin in general and sins in particular should be preached against from the pulpit regularly. If this is done in the right manner, it will keep many Christians from going into sin. What a pity that so many preachers are afraid to preach against sin.

#### **Paul's Instruction to the Church**

Paul's instruction to the Corinthian Church is plain. Here is what he told the Church to do: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." I Cor. 5:4, 5, 13-b In other words, the man was to be turned out of the Church. He could no longer be in fellowship with the Church. This did not doom his soul, but it would purge or remove sin from the Church body.

#### **Five Bible Reasons for Discipline**

1. Immorality as is explained in I Cor. 5:1-13.
2. False doctrine cannot be tolerated by a Church. See I Tim. 6:1-5; I Tim. 1:19-20; and II Tim. 2:16- 18. "From such withdraw thyself." I Tim. 6:5-b
3. A disorderly walk. "Now we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly . . . For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies . . . And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." II Thess. 3:6, 11, 14, 15
4. Divisions contrary to Bible doctrine. Rom. 16:17, 18; Titus 3:10; Acts 20:28-32
5. Unrepentant attitude over sin. Matt. 18:15-20 ". . . if he neglect to hear the Church let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Matt. 18:17

#### **Proper Attitudes in Discipline**

Church discipline has fallen into ill repute, because it has many times been practiced in an un-scriptural manner. Harshness, bitterness, and hatred should have no place in Church discipline. If such business is conducted in a spirit of anger and emotion, it will probably do more harm than good. Church members should be mourning, and praying if others are guilty of sin.

Church discipline should be carried out in a scriptural manner. Spirituality, humility, and meek-ness should be manifested by those who are taking action. Read Gal. 6:1 and Matt. 18:15-20.

A firm and uncompromising stand is essential. "Rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith." Titus 1:13 "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." I Tim. 5:20

Love for the erring brother must be manifested. "Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." II Thess. 3:15

There should be full forgiveness for those who repent and confess. ". . . If he repent, forgive him." Luke 17:3

### **Reasons for Church Discipline**

1. Church discipline is commanded in the word of God. We should obey God.
2. It will remove the defilement of sin. "Purge out therefore the old leaven." I Cor. 5:7a  
Proper Church discipline will maintain the purity and power of the Church, and thus retain the blessing of God.
3. It will restrain others. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." I Tim. 5:20
4. It is always hoped that it will bring about the repentance and restoration of the erring brother. It seems quite certain that the immoral man of I Cor. 5, latter repented and was restored to fellowship in the Church. Read II Cor. 2:4-11

### **IV. DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH OF GOD AND THE LORD'S SUPPER**

The Bible does not teach open communion. Every one that loves Jesus is not invited to the Lord's Table. The Lord's Supper is a Church ordinance. The Church was organized before the institution of the Lord's Supper. Unsaved nor unbaptized people are never invited to the Lord's Table.

The order in Matt. 28:19 is: (1) Salvation (2) Baptism (3) Ob-serving of all things; this would of course include the Lord's Supper.

The order in Acts 2:41, 42 is: (1) Salvation (2) Baptism (3) Fellowship (4) Breaking of bread.

The command to the Church at Corinth was: "Keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you." I Cor. 11:2

The Lord's Supper is the ordinance under discussion in I Cor. 11.

### **Conditions Which Prevent the Observance of the Lord's Supper**

"When ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you . . . there must be also heresies among you. . . . When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper." I Cor. 11:18, 19, 20. Notice the phrase in verse 20, "this is not to eat the Lord's Supper." The literal meaning of this phrase is: "Ye cannot eat the Lord's Supper." In the midst of division, heresies, and disorder such as is described in I Cor. 11:17-34, it is impossible to eat the Lord's Supper until these disorders are corrected in the Church.

### **A Brother Living in Sin is not to be Invited to the Lord's Supper**

"Now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; WITH SUCH AN ONE NO NOT TO EAT." I Cor. 5:11. This makes it quite plain that "any man that is called a brother" cannot live in sin and be invited to the Lord's Supper. This scripture deals with the present state of the man, not his past state. Many who are now good and faithful

Christians once lived in the vilest of sins. "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified." I Cor. 6:11.

The only place that the Lord's Supper can scripturally be observed is in a local New Testament Baptist Church. Only the members of that local Church should partake of it. Every person who partakes of the Lord's Supper should be a saved, baptized member of that particular Church. The Church as a body has no way of knowing about the qualifications of those who are not members of that local church. . . . "do not ye judge them that are within?" I Cor. 5:12.

The Bible says, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." I Cor. 11:28. If a man will do this, then all will be well. But if he refuses to examine and judge him-self, then the Church body has every right to exclude him from the Church and from the Lord's Supper, until he repents and confesses.

#### SUMMARY

Sin in the Child of God, should be confessed and forsaken. This will save the Child of God from chastisement.

Sin in the Church of God, should be recognized as a threat to the health and welfare of the entire local Church body.

The Church has the authority to deal with sin in its membership. Members who persist in living in sin should be excluded from the membership of the Church, until such time that they confess and repent of their sin.

Church members, who are living in sin, should not be allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper by the Church.

A proper attitude toward Church discipline will not make Pharisees out of the Christians. It will not make spies and snoopers out of the pastor and other Church officers. It will not cause an outbreak of gossip-fever among the members. When a Christian gets pleasure or satisfaction in talking about the sin of fellow Christians, it is proof positive that their heart is not right with God. When we see a Christian in sin, we ought to have a broken heart about it.

The testimony of independent, fundamental Baptist Churches is rapidly being destroyed because of a failure to practice Church discipline. In these last days of apostasy, may Churches be awakened to the awful danger from within.



## What Kind of Baptist? \_\_\_\_\_

Norman H. Wells

Taken from the book, *The Church That Jesus Loved*, 1973, Chapter 4

**S**ince publishing this paper we have received many letters and cards inquiring as to what kind of Baptist we were. I presume folks mean what affiliations we have with Conventions, Associations, Fellowships, etc. It seems some of our Baptist folk make membership in some such organization the supreme test of a Baptist.

**First** of all we are Bible believing Baptist. We believe the Bible is God's holy inspired, inerrant, infallible Word. We believe it tells us about an Almighty, Omniscient, Omnipresent God who is Creator of all as recorded in Genesis. We believe it tells us about the Lord Jesus Christ, the Divine, Virgin-born sinless, Son of God who died a vicarious

death upon the cross, was buried and arose the third day and one day is coming in clouds of glory in a pre-millennial return. We believe it tells us about the third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit.

**Second**, we are saved Baptists. We believe that by Grace of God when we came to a place of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that God saved us. We believe that we are saved for time and eternity and that we can never be lost. We believe we are saved from a burning hell of fire and brimstone and saved for a literal heaven with streets of gold.

**Third**, we are baptized Baptists. We were baptized, by immersion in water, to show forth the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We were baptized because we were saved not in order to be saved. We were baptized by the authority of a local, New Testament Baptist church. Our baptism was an outward demonstration of an inward work of grace.

**Fourth**, we are Church-Member Baptists. We believe we were baptized into the local body, a Baptist church. We believe in the local, visible, church and no other kind. We believe that Jesus Christ established this church and it alone has the authority to administer baptism and the Lord's Supper.

**Fifth**, we are Church Communion Baptists. We believe that Jesus Christ left the Lord's Supper as a memorial of Himself. We should partake of the bread and wine in remembrance of Him. We believe the church has the authority to administer this meal to its own members over whom it has the power of discipline.

**Sixth**, we are separate Baptists. We believe that a Christian should live a clean, holy, godly life in this world. We should shun the very appearance of evil.

**Seventh**, we are evangelistic Baptists. We believe that it is the privilege and duty of every Christian to be a soul-winner. We believe that it is the responsibility of the individual, local church to go into all the world in an effort to make disciples, baptize them and teach them.

Every church should be a missionary Baptist church. If it is not then it is not Baptist.

We could go on and on but I believe this conveys the Idea.



## The Master's Promise

---

Roy Mason

Taken from the book, *The Church That Jesus Built*, 1923, Chapter 5

"Not only did Christ promise to be with His ecclesia to the end of the world, when He gave the Commission, but when He established the memorial supper and delivered it to His church He said, 'This do in remembrance of Me till I come.' Now if the doing of a thing is to be perpetuated the doers of the thing must be perpetuated. This is a self-evident proposition."

—W. D. Nowlin, in *Western Recorder*.

In the preceding chapters I have shown that Jesus, during the period of His personal ministry, organized and began His church. I have further shown that the church which He began was not an ethereal, invisible, universal, unorganized something without either function or mission, but that it was the local assembly, entrusted with the greatest task that was ever given to any institution on this earth.

So, having in existence the church, and having in mind a clear idea as to what kind it is, we are ready for the further question proposed at the beginning, namely, *Did Jesus Promise Its Perpetuity?*

Unquestionably He did.

In the same passage where we have our Lord's first mention of the church we find the promise that "The gates of hades shall not prevail against it."

None will deny that these words constitute a promise of the church's perpetuity. Dr. J. W. Porter says (*World's Debt to Baptists*): "If these words teach anything, they teach that the churches instituted by Christ and the apostles would never die, but would reproduce and multiply and perpetuate themselves to the end of all time." Of the passage, "The gates of hades shall not prevail against it," Dr. Nowlin says (*Fundamentals of the Faith*), "Referring no doubt to its indestructibility."

But lest we should be led to depend too much upon the passage just referred to, let us ask, "Is there anything else in the Scriptures that would warrant us in believing that Christ meant to perpetuate His church?" The answer is we find abundant evidence of this. Let us look at some of the proof:

"First, the Kingdom of God, as all will agree is to be perpetuated "until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ." (Rev. 11:15). In Luke we have this statement: "Of His kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1:33).

How, let us ask, is the kingdom of God to be extended and advanced in the world? The answer is, by the church which Jesus founded. Men get into the kingdom of God by being born into it. This spiritual birth comes about through personal faith in the Son of God as Saviour. It is the church that preaches the Good News of the Son of God. Through the church's message men hear, believe, and are born into God's kingdom. Thus the church stands in the position of a recruiting agency for the kingdom of God, since no one gets into the kingdom except as they hear and believe the gospel, which has been preserved and is proclaimed by the church.

So, in summing up we state it this way: the Bible teaches that the kingdom of God is to be perpetuated. It shows that the church is Christ's divinely purposed instrumentality for the advancement and perpetuation of the kingdom. This being true, the Bible's teaching as to the perpetuity of the kingdom involves as a matter of course the perpetuity of the agency through which the kingdom is to be perpetuated—namely—the church.

Again, when Christ gave the Great Commission to His disciples, as has been shown, He addressed them not simply as individuals, but as individuals constituting His church. To the Commission He added the promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." Manifestly, if the church at any time ceased to exist, Christ's promise would become of none effect. To be with the church always, or more properly, "all the days," necessarily means that there must always, every day, until the end of the age, be in existence the church to which the promise was given!

Then again, all of the great denominations, so far as I can ascertain, agree that the Lord's Supper is a church ordinance. Now when Jesus instituted and gave this ordinance to His church to be observed, He said: "This do in remembrance of me . . . as oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death TILL HE COME."

Most certainly, if the doing of a thing is to be perpetuated, the doers of that thing must be perpetuated also. If the observance of the Lord's Supper is to be perpetuated until Christ comes again, then obviously the church to which He gave the ordinance must, in the very nature of the case, be perpetuated too. There is no escape from this conclusion!





# Fasting by English Baptists in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century

---

Joseph Jackson Goadby

From the book, *Bye-Paths in Baptist History, 1871*

The Baptist of the Seventeenth Century regarded fasting as "a religious duty," "a solemn and Divine ordinance." Not, said he, that there were any set times appointed for its observance. That must be determined as occasion required."

"The drift of the apostles," said he, quoting Socrates Scholasticus, "was not to lay down causes and decrees concerning fasts and holy days; but to become unto us patterns of piety and good life."

Moreover, Augustine had affirmed "that upon what days we must fast he found not appointed by any commandment of our Lord or His Apostles." The Lenten fast of the Papist, with its feeble imitation by the English State Church, was regarded as altogether without scriptural warrant.

Not so all fasting whatsoever. Fasting was an "extraordinary duty," perhaps, rather than one to be stately observed; but still, the Master and Lord fasted; the Apostles imitated His example; and they (the Baptists), considered themselves as manifestly in the right when following in their steps.

There were "national" fasts, said one of them; and fasts that were either "congregational," or "particular."

Tenaciously as one exponent of Baptist opinions held to congregational principles, he yet contended, "that the king, or chief magistrate, might enjoin a day of general humiliation, when the judgments of God were impending, or were actually inflicted upon a nation." The "good example of the Ninevites" is quoted in illustration of this, "seeing there is no king but hath equal authority with the King of Nineveh in that case."

As for "congregational fasts," they might be fixed upon" by the pastors and leading men in the churches, with the advice of the brotherhood," supposing the churches should " find cause to humble themselves for any judgment which sin had brought on them, or for any blessing they came short of, or danger which attends them." The church at Antioch kept a fast unto the Lord, "without any intervening power of the magistrate; and there is no reason why other churches may not do the like, with every church is the most capable to judge of the necessity they have to wait upon God in such services."

The "particular fasts" were private; must be left to the judgment of individual Christians, and their families, "the special direction of our Saviour about them being duly observed."

"Let those in authority look to the first," says an exponent of their opinions at this period," and call their subjects thereto. Let Christ's ministers look to the second, and stir up the churches to this religious duty. Let every Christian look to the third, especially masters of Christian families; and as occasion requires, devote themselves to this holy exercise."

"Particular fasts" were to be held "on account of our imperfections; "as shown by the examples of David and Paul. Hence, Marlorat defines this kind of fasting as "a measurable castigation or chastising of the body, and a certain discipline, always used of the saints of God to this end, that the substance of heavenly things might be more amiable, and the desires of the body more quenched."

But Basil, referring to the spiritual part says, "True fasting standeth in a departure from vices, in the right government of the tongue, in suppressing wrath, in cutting off concupiscence, backbiting, malice, and perjuries"

"The true definition of this duty," says the writer, who quotes with approval these passages, "is, a beating down of the body, that we may fly from sin, and with more feeling taste the heavenly doctrine of godliness."

Men did fast, in the ancient time, "for deliverance from enemies; "but the chief cause for fasting, "that which gives being to all the rest," was sin; in others, or in ourselves." It is, moreover, the way to fit men for mercies, blessings, and favours to be desired."

When "congregational" fasts were decided upon, it was customary to state precisely their object. The Broadmead church among the Calvinistic Baptists, and the Fenstanton church among the General Baptists, set apart particular days for fasting and prayer when their elders, or ministers and deacons were elected; and nothing is more common, in the Records of both churches, than entries to that effect.

The church of Amersham, to take another example, decided to hold a fast in 1676, and thus announced beforehand the reasons for its being kept:

- (1) That the Lord would be pleased to humble us under a sense of our brother Rudrup's miscarriage, and that we may be more watchful for the future.
- (2) To bewail divisions that are among God's people; and to seek for a spirit of love, unity, illumination, and obedience.
- (3) To pray that the Lord would be pleased to continue a seasonable harvest.
- (4) To entreat Him to prevent all wicked designs which the enemies of the truth are devising against those that fear the Lord.
- (5) To beseech Him to support our sister Child under her heavy trials.
- (6) To beg that He would sanctify the affliction that is on Mary Hall, and give His blessing on her going to the bath for her recovery.

This selection of some special case as the object of humiliation, fasting, and prayer, was by no means unusual. Five-and twenty years before the date just given, a General Baptist Church in Cambridgeshire was informed "that Mary Cox was greatly afflicted with heavy temptation; and it was desired, by herself and her parents, that a day should be set apart by fasting to seek the Lord on her behalf: which," says the church record, " was consented unto."

A similar instance is chronicled in the Fair Street church-book. "Nov. 1, 1697: whereas, it was requested by sister Wood, whose daughter lies in a deplorable condition, that we keep a day of fasting and prayer to God; we agree, that Friday next be kept, at her house, from eight in the morning till four in the afternoon."

There is a case mentioned in the Broadmead Records, of the whole church fasting and praying on a particular day formerly set apart, on behalf of "the daughter of sister Tylly, one of the members of the congregation. "The child was "bewitched, (as termed) was very much changed, and had strange fits, and as it were haunted by an evil spirit, and would say that such a woman was in the room. . . . When they conveyed her to Bath, the whole church put apart a day for it, to seek the Lord by fasting and prayer, when Bro. Jessey was here, and the child was restored as well as before, and to this day. Ye glory only be given to our God."(*Broadmead Records*, Rev. N. Hayeroft, p. 87)

General fasts were often appointed by the Local Associations or General Assemblies. The General Assembly of General Baptists in 1711, appointed the 20th of June as a day of fasting and prayer, "to humble themselves before

Almighty God for their sins and great decay in religion; to seek the Lord for grace to be quickened and renewed therein, and also for national calamities; "and in 1714 the same body appointed " a quarterly fast to be kept for one year on the Wednesday after every quarter-day."

The Midland Association, in 1726, was only following a common custom when it recommended four days of fasting and prayer "to be kept by the churches between that meeting and the next, in order that it may have power from heaven."

It must not be supposed that these fast days among the early Baptists were not rigidly kept. They sometimes complained that "men did this service by the half part, which they called forty days fasting, or Lent."

In that period some do abstain from every living creature; and others, of all living creatures, feed only upon fish. Others, together with fish, feed on the fowls of the air. Others eat neither nuts, apples, neither any other kind of fruit, nor eggs. Some feed only upon dry bread; some others receive not that." Among the last were the Baptists.

"Although the kingdom of God standeth not," said the advocate already quoted, "in meat and drink, but in righteousness, &c., yet God is well pleased that His servants deny themselves in that respect. True fasting, if for a day, or for a short space of time, is not from some kinds of food only, but a total forbearance from all nutriment, except necessity require an indulgence."

The vain pretense of fasting, rebuked by Jerome, is held up as a warning.

"What profit," said Jerome, "not to eat of the oil, and to seek certain dainties and difficult kind of meats? As figs, pears, nuts, fruits of palms or dates, the flower of wheat, of honey, and such kind of meats. There is no kind of garden fruit wherewith we do not torment ourselves to the end we eat not bread. And whilst we do follow pleasures, we are drawn from the King of Heaven.

"Further, I have heard that some who against the rule of nature drink no water, and eat no bread, but do eat of delicate supplings and of panned leeks. What a shame is this! How are we not ashamed of such follies? How are we not wearied of such superstitions? Do we seek in delicates the savour of abstinence?"

After quoting this passage, the Baptist advocate of fasting urges his brethren "to avoid the vanities of the Papists and others, and to study the simplicity of the service, and the holy ends thereof." (Grantham's, *Christianism Primitive*, - Of Church Discipline, pp. 144-149)

