

The Final State of Unbelievers

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The teaching of the Holy Scriptures in regard to this state comprises the following particulars:

1. That it begins directly after the last judgment. Retribution naturally follows judgment, and there are many expressions in the Word of God that seem to connect the final state of the wicked with that act. (e. g., Matt. 25:41, 46; Rom. 2:5-16; Rev. 20:10-15)

2. That it continues the same in kind forever. The language of Christ and the apostles is apparently unambiguous on this point (See Matt. 25:46; Mark 9:47-48; Rev. 20:10, 15; 22:11, 15). The explanation of the Greek word or words translated "eternal," "forever," etc., as denoting quality, rather than duration, must be pronounced untenable. Its origin may probably be traced to the opposition which men feel to the doctrine of endless misery.

This doctrine is said to be abhorrent to reason and inconsistent with the perfection of God. Nevertheless, an impartial study of what the Lord Jesus and his apostles taught leads to this startling and offensive doctrine. The Greek word here used, if turned into a corresponding form in our language, would be represented by *ceonian*. The space allowed for these notes gives no opportunity for the discussion of this word; but the writer of the note would say that in his view the adjective had in it the quantitative, rather than the qualitative, element, as it was used by the New Testament writers in general, and that even what may be called its qualitative use in John's gospel was, if we may so express it, founded upon the quantitative idea. The word seems to have been a word involving the idea of duration; and, in the adjective form, it seems to have come into use as the thought of duration began to reach out more fully beyond this earthly life." (*Sunday School Times*, for May 6, 1888)

In looking at this doctrine three things should always be borne in mind:

(a) That no one of us can fairly claim to know the demerit of sin, or the penalty which absolute holiness would inflict on the sinner. Imperfect knowledge and conscious selfishness disqualify every man for the office of judge in this matter.

(b) That God perfectly knows the nature of man, the demerit of sin, and the misery which should be its retribution. Moreover, the perfection of his character is more certain to our reason than the injustice of eternal punishment.

(c) That eternal sin is presupposed by eternal misery. It is the impenitent, the unbelieving, the enemies of God and righteousness, who are cast out into the outside darkness, and there is no evidence that they will ever come to a

better mind. In a moral universe, rightly constituted, incorrigible, wickedness draws after it perpetual loss and pain. The worm that dieth not is kept alive by sin, and sin is the movement of a free being in his chosen way. If he is a slave, he is in bondage to self, and not to another.

(3) That it is worse for some than for others. (Matt. 11:21-24; Luke 12:47, 48; Heb. 10:29)—There are degrees of punishment in the final state. Some unbelievers are more guilty than others, since they have rejected clearer light, and have become more hardened and bitter in their enmity to God. Justice will therefore impose a severer penalty on them. But no one will suffer a breath of anguish more than he ought to suffer. Whether the misery of the lost will increase from aeon to aeon, or will soon reach its maximum and then remain practically stationary, we are unable to say. In favor of the former hypothesis, appeal may be made to the law of progress in the present life. Bad men and good are both endowed with faculties and impulses tending to growth. Why should it not be so hereafter? Why should not the love of knowledge continue active, and the mind itself be enlarged without limit?

General observation favors this view. But in favor of the latter hypothesis, it may be urged, that a sense of guilt tends to rob men of hope, to make them love darkness rather than light, to concentrate thought and desire upon self; and that all this belittles the soul and limits the range of its activity. In a word, growth must be retarded, if not wholly arrested, by sin and despair. This result is also suggested by some of the imagery employed by the sacred writers in describing the state of the lost- e. g., by the outside darkness. But we are moving in the realm of speculation, and cannot be sure that it is towards the truth. Certainly, no one can hold that this process of self-reproach, isolation, and hopeless inaction, will at last end in unconsciousness, without misinterpreting the word of God. Nirvana is not the final state of unbelievers. Eternal rest is not eternal punishment. The words of Dr. McLaren deserve to be read:

"The fate of the indolent servant has a double horror. It is loss and suffering...Gifts unemployed are stripped off a soul yonder. How much will go from many a richly endowed spirit, which here flashed with unconsecrated genius and force!...How far that process of divesting may go on faculties, without touching the life, who can tell?...But loss is not all the indolent servant's doom. Once more, like the slow tone of a funeral bell, we hear the dread sentence to the murky midnight without, where are tears undried and passion unavailing. The most loving lips that ever spoke have, in love, shaped this form of words, so heart touching in their wailing but decisive proclamation of blackness, homelessness, and sorrow, and cannot but toll them over and over again into our ears, in sad knowledge of our forgetfulness and unbelief."

(4) That it involves no useless or arbitrary suffering.— Of this we are confident, not because we know the precise character of the evil which will overtake the ungodly hereafter, but because the Lord of all the earth will do right. The evil which is to come upon the ungodly in their final state is portrayed by the sacred writers in figurative speech, suggesting for the most part physical suffering, like that which men experience in this life. "The worm that never dies," "the outside darkness," "the lake of fire," the companionship of bad men and demons, are all, except the last, figurative expressions, intended to fix in the mind an apprehension of great suffering. But we have no reason to interpret them as revealing the nature of that suffering.

The reaction of reason and conscience against self-will may have a large place in the penalty of sin. Self-condemnation, self-reproach, and self-contempt are sure to be ministers of God's displeasure with those who will not obey the truth.

Despair of future good must also mingle with the memory of slighted opportunity, and fill the soul with gloom. Remorse is certain to do its work with dreadful constancy. Thus God's servants are placed in the constitution of man's spirit, and that spirit will therefore scourge itself for persisting in sin. Everything may come to pass through the energies of life itself. Of course, the environment may be concerned in moral retribution.

The resurrection body of the wicked may enhance their misery. But it is not easy to conceive of any place where a lost soul would be at rest. Heaven would have no attractions for it. Darkness would be preferred to light, and separation from God, to fellowship with him. Yet out of God's presence it is impossible to flee. "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me...Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee." (Ps. 139:8-ff)

As a final thought in Eschatology, reference may be made to the vast preponderance of good over evil as the fruit of redemption and judgment. Not only will order be restored throughout the universe, but the good will by far outnumber the bad; the saved will be many times more than the lost. Not that Jesus, or any one of his disciples, has asserted this in so many words.

The proportion of the lost to the saved is nowhere revealed in definite language. It looks, indeed, as if the Redeemer considered it unwise to satisfy human curiosity on this point. If we study his words closely they will be found to stop far short of fixing any definite ratio between the two classes.

In his Sermon on the Mount it is said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. (Matt. 7:13, 14) But this saying seems to have been intended to describe the conduct of men then living, rather than to foreshadow the two opposite currents of human life to the end of time.

Again, Jesus is reported by Luke as saying, in answer to the question, "Lord, are there few that be saved?", "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." (Luke 13:24) But there is nothing in this to indicate the proportion of those who enter in to those who fail of entering. Indeed, the precise question is not answered, but is made the occasion for a serious exhortation and warning.

In the parable of the ten virgins who went out to meet the bridegroom, five are described as wise and five as foolish; but the parable appears to lay no stress upon the equal number of the two classes, and it would, doubtless, be fanciful to insist upon it as significant.

In the parable of the wheat and tares, we may reasonably presume that the wheat should be regarded as much more abundant than the tares, for this would generally be the case in Jewish farming; but there is no explicit reference to it in the words of Jesus, and we cannot rely upon it as a just inference. It is only a conjecture, after all.

In the twin parables of the talents and the pounds, the proportion of the faithful to the unfaithful is as two to one; yet in neither parable is any use made of this circumstance. Besides, it is by no means certain that "the servants" signify all mankind, from the beginning of human history to its end.

And, lastly, in the parable of the wedding feast, only one of the guests is represented as not having a wedding garment, though the house was filled. But nothing is said to show that the ratio of the many to the one will be realized at the judgment day. As far as explicit teaching on this point there is none from the lips of Jesus.

Nor is there anything like a numerical comparison between the saved and the lost in the apostolic writings. But there are a few general expressions which foretell a magnificent outcome from Christ's mediatorial work. It is impossible to read them without prejudice, and still believe that more than a small proportion of men and angels will be cast out into the outer darkness.

Yet, as we have before seen, they are not to be interpreted as predicting the ultimate recovery of all moral beings from sin to holiness. In one of them, God is said to have purposed "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:" (Eph. 1:10); in another, it is said that he "...hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. 1:22, 23); in another, that "...it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven." (Col. 1:19, 20); and in another that "...he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death...And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." (1 Cor. 15:25, 26, 28).

"Then," says Dr. Kendrick,

"shall be no more curse. Sickness and death, physical, mental, social, moral evil, all banished utterly and forever from that kingdom which—stretching over our entire earth, and including we know not how many sister spheres—shall have succeeded to the imperfect and perishable monarchies of time! Then shall be nothing to vex or destroy in all God's holy mountain; no more sorrow, no more suffering, no more error, no more death, because no more sin! Somewhere within the creation of God, we are bound to believe, will be the prison-house of apostate angels, and of impenitent and unredeemed men, where sin that now riots in exulting license, shall writhe in darkness and bondage. But within the wide boundaries of the visible, organized, and ever-increasingly glorious kingdom of Christ, shall be no defilement and no sorrow."

Were the world of the lost to be at all comparable in numbers or strength to the world of the saved, it would be difficult to understand how Paul could have written the passages quoted, and especially difficult to see how he could have predicted that God should be "all in all."

Moreover, though the sacred writers say nothing in respect to the future condition of those who die in infancy, one can scarcely err in deriving from this silence a favorable conclusion. That no prophet or apostle, that no devout father or mother, should have expressed any solicitude as to those who die before they are able to discern good from evil, is exceedingly surprising, unless such solicitude was prevented by the Spirit of God. There are no instances of prayer for children taken away in infancy. The Saviour nowhere teaches that they are in danger of being lost. We therefore heartily and confidently believe that they are redeemed by the blood of Christ and sanctified by his Spirit, so that when they enter the unseen world they will be found with the saints. Thus almost half of the human race is rescued from the ruin of the fall by the Saviour's grace. And to these must naturally be added all others who have been incapable of moral action in this life. As to religion, the idiot has no knowledge and no accountability more than the infant.

Nor is this all. There are several prophecies of the Old Testament, which depict the Messiah's reign among men as peaceful, universal, and enduring (e.g., Ps. 72; Isa. 9:6, 7; 11:1-9). And there is at least one prophecy of the New Testament which may fairly be classed with those referred to in the Old—namely, the paragraph in the twentieth chapter of Revelation concerning the Millennium. For that blessed period, whether it is to be preceded or to be followed by the second coming of Christ, is undoubtedly described as a very long period; and during the whole of it the controlling influence will be positively where a singular interpretation, having no solid foundation, is given.

The saints will inherit the earth. The powers of evil will be restrained. Rulers and people will unite in doing the will of God. Kings will be nursing fathers, and queens nursing mothers unto the true Israel. And when the duration and the character of this magnificent period are borne in mind, it will seem no exaggeration to say that the faithful on earth will become like the sands upon the seashore—innumerable. Long before this, John saw, in holy vision, "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." (Rev. 7:9, 10)

"We have reason to believe," remarks Dr. Chas. Hodge, "that the number of the finally lost in comparison with the whole number of the saved will be very inconsiderable. Our blessed Lord, when surrounded by the innumerable company of the redeemed, will be hailed as the '*Salvator Hominum*,' the Saviour of Men, as the Lamb that bore the sins of the world" (*Syst. Theology*, III, p. 880).

"For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." (1 Cor. 13:12) Then, and not before, will our theodicy be made perfect. Meantime, guided by the starlight of prophecy, we may journey onward in hope through the dim present into the luminous future—"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Cor. 4:18) Under the holy influence of what we can thus discover, let us give earnest heed to the admonition: "To-day, if ye shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts." (Heb. 4:7)



A Notable Woman

J. L. Burrows, D.D.

From the book, *What Baptists Believe*, 1887

"Seest thou this woman?"—Luke 7:44

S*ee*st thou this woman? Oh, yes! Simon had seen her; that is, he had glanced at her, as a very good person glances at a very disreputable one met in the street, or as a fashionably dressed lady might meet a shabby cousin from the country. You know this kind of glance that recognizes without looking, that throws the eyes into the corners and keeps the face in another direction; that seems to say, "I see you, but I had rather you wouldn't know it or notice it."

Oh, yes! Simon saw her, and some rather suspicious thoughts were running through his mind as he furtively watched her operations. Probably he thought it a piece of intrusive impudence that such a city sinner should presume to venture to cross the threshold of such a very respectable mansion. He was watching Jesus, too, to see how he would receive this affectionate familiarity from this very disreputable person. Being a stranger in this little Galilee city, he might not know who or what she was, but if he was a prophet, as reputed, he would know by inspiration what manner of woman this was that touched him. He doubtless began to be rather dubious about the insight and purity of this Nazarene teacher, who was permitting his holiness to be soiled by such defilement.

I presume there must have been surprised and embarrassed silence during this scene. The thoughts of the self-righteous Pharisee were evidently not very favorable toward the humble guest, whom he had loftily condescended to invite to the distinguished honor of a seat at his table. He probably thought, "This woman would not have dared to take such liberties with me." And so the contrast between himself and Jesus must have been quite consolatory to his righteous soul.

No! No! Simon! No poor, heart-broken sinner would ever have ventured to approach thee, with trustful, loving eyes, expecting pity and comfort and help. Not to such as thee in any of the ages, nor in this day, would a disgraced and polluted outcast approach for rescue or help. Thy virtue is too severe; thy sense of the proprieties too delicate to encourage such contact or converse. Thou art a righteous man, Simon, and for the righteous man one would scarcely die, but for a good man—i.e., a benevolent, loving-hearted man, as Jesus was to Magdalene—many like her would even dare to die. So does love win love.

Brethren, in your bearing and spirit toward the ruined and guilty children of earth, are you most like Simon or most like Jesus? "*Seest thou this woman?*"—not with scornful, indignant flashes, not with repelling, crushing words, but with compassionate, helpful regard, with encouraging, reclaiming, purifying words and deeds.

Seest thou this woman? Here is a novelty. Why, it is a woman at the feet of Christ. Did you ever hear of a woman at the feet of Plato or Aristotle? Did any of the old world masters in philosophy ever condescend to enroll women among their disciples? What did paganism or modern heathenism ever do for the elevation of woman? What has Mohammedanism done for woman? Judaism, the next best system to Christianity, because it had more of the true God in it, gave woman in exceptional instances, as Miriam and Deborah, more honor and dignity and equality with man, but it was left for Christianity, in the four thousandth year of the history of the race, is alone to raise woman to the side of man, to equality in responsibility, dignity and esteem with man.

Did you ever hear of an instance in all the world's history in which any religion, but that of Christ, had compassion or toleration for a guilty woman except as an object of sensual love or brutal lust? My sisters, above all others you ought, as you do, to love and honor Christ, for he alone of all earth's reformers and philosophers has announced himself as the redeemer of woman. Heathen men reproached the missionaries for teaching a religion which was "the shield of woman."

Seest thou this woman? There are grand capabilities of good in her, which Jesus can develop and bring into beneficent exercise. Defiled, evil and injurious her heart and life may have been, but beneath all that exterior and within all the pollutions of that spirit, the eye of the Saviour discerns potentialities for virtue and beneficence and holiness, progressive

through the eternities. It is a vile, but it is a convertible heart. Then we need despair of no sinner, and no sinner need despair of himself. The heart may be stone, but a clearer eye than that of Michael Angelo may trace an angel form in that stone.

The image of God, in which man was originally made, lies buried in that sepulchre, and though crusted all over, and petrified all through by the debris of depravity and vice, yet there is a "hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces," and a fire that consumeth the corroding dross and brings the ruined material into glorious shape by the reconstruction of regeneration. Simon saw in this woman nothing but a worthless, lost sinner, of whom and for whom there was no hope. He could discern in her only the soiled cocoon of a dead worm. Jesus' eye pierced through the rotten fibres, and discovered within, struggling to break through, a brilliant creation, with wings of all rainbow tints, to soar above the earth on which it had crawled and adorn the world with new strange beauties.

A new life had already entered into the soul of this woman, and was working outwardly toward its new and higher sphere. Oh look! my brethren, upon fallen humanity, even in its groveling meanness of depravity, not as something to be despised and trampled, but as containing germs for evolving a pure and beautiful immortality. And let the gospel in your hands and lips and lives become what the Lord, its blessed author, himself was—the compassionate reclamer and regenerator of the poor and despised. What Christ was we must become in our narrower sphere of influence—friends of sinners, with words of instruction, encouragement and love ever on our tongues.

Seest thou this woman? Let her teach thee today a lesson in faith. Evidently, she had met the Lord before. He had said something to her, done something for her that won her gratitude and love. Some suppose he had healed her of some bodily malady, cast out of her tormenting demons, or, it maybe, he had warned her of the results of an evil life, awakened in her soul longings for a purer, higher life. She had been brought to believe in him. Not yet probably had her faith reached a sense of assurance and pardon. But it was clear enough to convince her that only in him was there safety and comfort for her. Her case in all its essential features is yours and mine.

Whether believers or impenitent, we are sinners. In all the universe there is only One who can give us pardon and peace. This only One has promised these highest blessings. Do you believe him? Then, like this woman, come directly to him. Take no instructions from others, except as such instructions show you the way to his feet. He will be the best instructor. Open your ear to his gracious words. This is *fait* - unquestioning belief in his word, in his power to redeem, in his loving willingness and solicitude to save. Not faith in your worthiness, or fitness or endeavors. She had none; but faith in his grace, in his nature, in his work—in a word, faith in himself.

Seest thou this woman? Did you ever see more genuine penitence? Here was open acknowledgment of open sin. She had been known as vile. She will be known as repentant and reformed. Here is a changed life, but it is not a cold, politic, logical change; its source is as deep as the well of tears; it originates in the inner recesses of the spirit. No such tears, poured out in such position, could be simulated or hypocritical. It is not dread of the results of sin, or she would not have exposed herself to the sneers and scorn of the Pharisee and his guests and servants. It is grief for a wasted life and a sin-stained soul that wrings those tears from her heart.

We cannot read this narrative without being impressed with the genuineness and sincerity of this woman's emotions. So must it ever be with true repentance. It is based upon a sense of guilt. It looks deeper than to the conduct, down into the sources and springs of the conduct, an evil heart. Not what I have done so much as what I am, in character and spirit, as under the holy, omniscient eye of the Lord opens the deepest fountain of repentant tears.

"My sins, my sins, my Saviour,
They take such hold on me
I am not able to look up,
save only, Christ, to thee.
In thee is all forgiveness,
In thee abundant grace;
My shadow and my sunshine,
The brightness of thy face."

Seest thou this woman? Learn a lesson in humility. Here is no pride, no self-assertion, no claim of rights nor of personal consideration, no excuses nor palliations, no haughty transferring of blame to others, no accusation of tempters or temptations. Unostentatiously, modestly, too much absorbed in her own emotions and yearnings to care for or notice the eyes that watch her movements, seeing only Jesus and thinking only of him, she glides softly within the hall, and kneeling behind his extended feet as he reclines at the table, as though she would hide there from all eyes, even from his own, she proceeds to her loving ablutions. She has carried thither the water for washing his blessed feet, not in a ewer, but in her heart, and she pours it forth as in soft, warm dew-drops from her eyes. She has brought a napkin to wipe off those drops; her own long tresses loosened over her own bowed face and over those precious feet, as if to veil the kisses she pressed upon them.

If you will only imagine the position, you will see nothing that looks like boldness or ostentation or presumption here, but only a sweet and beautiful humility. Here is no conformity to custom or ritual, no pope in ostentatious pride washing beggars' feet by book for the admiration of a gaping crowd, but a spontaneous yielding to a grateful impulse, and this is always the purest and highest worship which a human spirit can offer to the Lord.

Seest thou this woman? Above all else, learn from her a lesson in holy love. For it is manifestly love that underlies and prompts all. Because she loved much she did all this. Can you conceive of any manifestations of a pure love for a person more tender or touching than these? She does not speak one word. No expression of devotion or endearment falls from her lips. What need is there of words? We feel that a voice would have diminished rather than enhanced the expressiveness and pathos of this scene. The streaming tears, the bowed head, the hair that screened as with a silken veil the lovely face of the worshipper and the moistened feet of the Saviour, the warm kisses that wiped away the tear-drops—these were tender expressions of holy love which no fond words could intensify.

Oh! brethren, do not let your love for Jesus exhaust itself in words. He asks not for empty professions, but for heart emotions, expressed in loving acts. "My little children, let us love not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth."..."Not every one that saith unto me, Lord! Lord! but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

Love expresses itself most sincerely in self-sacrificing, spontaneous acts. Professions of love for Christ are cheap and often shallow; but the love that wells out from an overflowing heart, that freely gushes into little rills of beneficence and fertility, that draws out a tear of sympathy with those who weep and lights up the face with a glad smile upon those who rejoice, which pities the poor and opens the hand to the needy, which ministers to the suffering and yearns for the wandering, which emulates the spirit of Christ in doing good—these are the expressions of love for him, infinitely more precious to him than all the formalities of wordy profession.

See, too, how brave her love made this woman. The unlikeliest place in which she could look for a welcome or tolerance was a Pharisee's house. The rigidly righteous, the severely religious are not specially friends to sinners. The purest in heart are the most pitiful. But even here under this Pharisee's scorning eye and scowling brow, whence, if she had thought, she might have expected to be driven out by his ordered menials, love gave her courage to go, seeking her adored Lord.

The highest courage has its stimulus in love. Up the crags of the precipice to the eagle's nest, whither the hardy chamois-hunter shudders to climb, love will wing the feet of a mother rushing to rescue her stolen child. And love for Jesus, if it be anything like his love for us, will carry us through sacrifices and dangers, to look bravely in the scorner's eye, to confess Jesus before a sneering world, to bear his banner amid barbarian hosts, to meet without quailing the frowns of kings and without blanching the dungeons and flames of martyrdom. Nothing inspires such courage as earnest love for Christ.

Seest thou this woman? Now look at the costly offering which her love prompted. She brings something to him. She bears in her hand an alabaster flask of precious ointment, and pours it over his feet. Love brings its gift. It selfishly withholds nothing of its possessions from its object. It is no hard duty to give where you love. The Magdalene was not asked to bring her costly ointment for the anointing of Jesus. It was the spontaneous suggestion of her love. Love is liberal. This alabaster box, with its expensive nard, was the best she had, and probably, certainly, the most appropriate offering she could make, and was so accepted and approved by the Lord.

Oh! how ashamed and humiliated we have often reason to be by the appeals we have made, and so often made in vain, to the liberality of Christ's disciples, to express their love for him, their interest in what is dearest to his heart—the enlargement and establishment of his kingdom. Many seem to be so reluctant to spare an offering for Christ. They look so troubled and pained when appeals to their benevolence are urged; not because they are so poor, but because they are so unwilling. And when they do reluctantly give, it is not like this woman, the best they have, but what can with least inconvenience be spared.

Ah, brethren, what is needed most by the disciples of Christ are not resources, but love. If we only loved like this saint, the contents of our alabaster boxes and all other treasure-boxes would be freely poured out at his feet. Let not covetousness and greed be stronger than love. A profounder love of Christ will induce a larger liberality, and nothing but this will.

Let this woman teach us yet another lesson. This: that our offerings to Christ, when made in love, are of more benefit to ourselves than to him or to his cause. Mary was more blessed by her offering than Jesus was. It seemed a waste to the covetous and selfish. And of itself it had no permanent use. The fragrance of the ointment evaporated in a day and left no trace behind. It was annihilated by using it. Was it then a useless expenditure? Not so thought Jesus. In a like case he said, "She has wrought a good work upon me, and this thing that she hath done shall be told throughout the world wherever the gospel is preached." The spirit of benevolence, cultivated by offerings, is of more value than the gifts themselves. Whether we believe it or not, "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

Accept and ponder then, dear brethren, the lessons which this woman teaches us today. Let them lead you to clearer ideas and a deeper experience of what is involved in the attracting love of Christ, in the convertible capabilities of a depraved soul, in repentance, faith, love, humility, courage and beneficence, and you, too, may go from this house as this woman went from the house of Simon, with the same words of Christ echoing joyfully on your souls, "Thy sins are forgiven thee—thy faith hath saved thee—go in peace."



The Spiritual Gifts of the Primitive Baptists _

William Cecil Duncan

From the book, *A Brief History of the Baptists: Their Distinctive Principles and Practices*, 1855

Christianity is, and has proved itself to be, "not merely a theory, nor an emotion, nor a collection of moral precepts and actions; but life in the deepest and most comprehensive sense." This community founded during the ministry of Jesus, and fully empowered on the day of Pentecost, was meant to be a world-renewing community; "the basis of every true advance in morality, science, art, social life and outward civilization, as well as the spring of all great events in later history." At first, when it was weak, and just beginning its attacks upon the strongholds of sin, God, through the Spirit, conferred upon the Church special powers or *charisms*.

Not the Apostles only, but the disciples at large, were, on the day of Pentecost, endowed with power "to speak with tongues;" and they were made able, through faith in Jesus, to perform works of unusual and even miraculous might. This power of working "signs and wonders" was certainly found, and certainly used, in the Church of Apostolic times. Believers in that age could and did perform miracles; and they who, witnessing them, were converted to Christ, were compelled to cry out in the words of the Psalmist, "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."

And yet, after all, even in that day of miracle-working, men were brought to Christ, as they are now, rather by the force of the truth commending itself to their consciences, and by seeing in those who already believed "the fruits of the spirit." They saw that the spirit of Christianity is a spirit of gentleness and love; giving peace to the mind, and waking up in the soul hope

and joy in the Holy Ghost. Beholding, they first wondered, then adored; and thus the religion of Jesus, exemplified in the lives of its professors, was spread far and wide in the world; and many, embracing it, laid hold on eternal life.

The "Gift of the Holy Ghost" which was granted to believers, in Apostolic times, at their baptism, or, subsequently, on the imposition of the hands of an Apostle, conferred, in some instances at least, the power of "speaking with tongues" and of working miracles. During our Lord's personal ministry, not only "the twelve," but the "seventy" disciples also, performed miracles in his name, and by his authority. In the same way, after the full empowerment of the Church, other Christians besides the Apostles were endowed with miracle-working gifts. The writings of the New Testament bear express testimony to this fact; and, while they do so, give no hint that this miracle-working power had ceased in the Church. Yet this Christian *charism* has departed from the Church. When, then, did it disappear? At what period did "the gift of the Holy Ghost" cease to operate in the Church by "miracles of power" over outward physical nature, and confine itself to the working of inward spiritual miracles of grace?

This question is more easily asked than answered. That miracle-working did not at once and wholly pass away with the Apostolic Age seems too well attested to be denied. The existence and the exercise of the power, at least in the first part of the period succeeding that of the Apostles, are testified to by many credible Christian witnesses,—"grave men, fair and honest, some of them philosophers; men who lived in different countries, and related not what they heard, but what they saw, calling on God to witness the truth of their declarations." And this "unanimous and concordant testimony of the ancient writers" is not denied, but admitted, by heathen opponents of Christianity living at the time; who would certainly, had they been able, have exposed the falsity of the claims set up by the new and hated religion of the despised Nazarene.

To suppose that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased to operate at once, and immediately, on the death of the Apostles, is contrary to the express testimony of credible witnesses, and contrary to all historic analogy. They rather disappeared gradually, as the Church was brought more and more under regular and settled training; and as it became less and less necessary to prove the truth of Christianity by external signs, and powers, and miracles. Physical miracles were useless, after the Church had been firmly established; for the Church itself, when established, was a standing miracle, and embraced "manifold wonders in its bosom."

The working of the spiritual-religious power of Christianity is its greatest miracle; and it is a miracle that will continue to operate as long as the Church shall exist. Hence, the outward, physical miracle is called, in the New Testament, "a sign", "a power"; a sign of a higher order of life, a power proceeding from the invisible world. The miracle-working power of the early Church has long since passed away; but the Church itself still stands, a perpetual miracle of God's providence and love.

"How meanly", then, it has been well said by Prof. Trench,

"do we esteem of a Church, of its marvelous gifts, of the powers of the coming world which are working within it, of its Word, of its [ordinances], when it seems to us a small thing that in it men are new-born, raised from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, the eyes of their understanding enlightened, and their ears opened; unless we can also tell of more visible and sensuous wonders. It is as though the heavens should not declare to us the glory of God, nor the firmament show us his handiwork, except at some single moment, such as that when the sun was standing still upon Gibeon, and the moon in Ajalon."

The miracle-working power was necessary in the early history of Christianity; for then the new faith had to contend against adverse and opposing influences, the force of which we, at this day, can hardly estimate. When the Church no longer needed such confirmation of her divine mission, "when to the wisdom of God it appeared that He had adequately confirmed the Word with signs following", the power of performing miracles ceased to be granted - and the Church, now firmly established in the world, was left to be itself a standing miracle for all coming time.

Beautifully and truthfully has Prof. Hagenbach expressed himself on this point, in his admirable popular *History of the Early Christian Church*:

"That from a corner of Judea, that from one who was crucified, and from the community of his disciples chosen from the lowest classes of mankind, there went forth a power which proclaimed destruction to

the great Roman Empire, and prepared it inwardly before it had been made ready by external circumstances; that neither fire and sword, nor all the wisdom and eloquence of the world, that neither falsehood and calumny nor the alluring prospect of rest and ease, could restrain those who believed from bearing witness to what they had experienced from without and within.

“That a blazing spark was cast into a world of sin and error, and that this spark kindled a fire which no might and no art of men could put out; that the most hardened and the most corrupt hearts were seized and wrought upon by the power of a truth which gave them no rest until they had found peace with God; that the lowliest and the most despised among the people learned to feel themselves a kingly race, called to rule the world and to judge the world.

“All this is a great miracle, a wondrous fact which cannot be denied, which cannot be explained by mechanical and outward influences; but can be comprehended only by admitting the principle which gave it its impulse and power; and this principle is none other than the unlimited principle of the eternal love and mercy of God. God wills that all men shall receive help; that all shall come to the knowledge of the truth, and that all shall attain to peace and to eternal life.

“This is the everlasting law of the divine government of the universe; a law which perfects itself in the history of the Church, in its struggle with the world and its unfriendly powers, but in a struggle carried on in confident expectation of future victory, even perfection in glory.”



Public Offences *or* Church Discipline

A. W. Chambliss

From *The Baptist Preacher*, 1845

“Now, I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause division and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them: for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ.”—Rom. 16:17, 18.

In a former discourse, we labored to show the distinction between public and private offences; and we hope we were not unsuccessful in explaining the divine law in relation to those who have trespassed against us, in our private capacity.

The offence was between us as individuals, and we had the right, nay, it was our duty, to settle the matter between ourselves. We may not, until every other expedient has failed, introduce it before the public. To bring it into the church is the very last resort. The language of the "Baptist Confession of Faith" (1699) is, "should any private matter be brought into the church, before the previous steps (described in Matt. 18) have been taken, the person that brings it in ought to be severely reprov'd and admonish'd, and that publicly, before the whole church, for his irregular and injurious conduct therein," (p. 221). "Let all things be done decently and in order."

Having, therefore, disposed of private offences, we shall in this, and the following discourse, invite your attention to those that are public. To such, our text has allusion. "Now, I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them: for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ." Or to use the paraphrase of the learned and pious Dr. Scott, on this place, "those persons must be marked with decided disapprobation and avoided, who aim to prejudice believers against each other — to draw them off from faithful pastors,—or to seduce them into strange doctrines and practices, contrary to the simple truths of God's Word."

The discipline of the church, in primitive times, was exceedingly strict. In the estimation of the apostle, *who* was inspired to

prescribe rules for the regulation of the house of God, it was a sufficient ground to put out a member who was the cause of dissensions and factions in the church: or that his deportment was calculated to bring scandal and reproach upon the cause of the Redeemer. Nor could it have been otherwise with him, who charged it, as a crime, upon the Jews, that "the name of God had been blasphemed through them."

In the apocalyptic vision, the Spirit said to the Ephesian church, by way of commendation, "thou canst not bear them which are evil." (Rev. 2:2) This was honor enough for one church; and it formed a striking contrast to the rebuke which the same spirit administered to the church at Pergamos. "I have a few things against thee, because thou hast them there which hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which things I hate." (v. 14, 15) In this church were some base, mercenary souls—of a covetous, temporizing spirit, similar to ancient Balaam, who, for the sake of gain, did not scruple to sacrifice the best interests of the people of God. Also, were retained in the communion, some, who, under the notion of "Christian liberty," did not hesitate to run into licentious indulgences—a set of antinomians, who "despised all rules and authority"—or to use a modern phrase, who; because "they were free, claimed the privilege to do just as they pleased."

The retention of such characters in the church, the Son of God said, "I hate." "Such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ." "Wherefore," said he, "repent, (that is, reform, turn them out) or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

It is a striking fact, which has doubtless occurred to every one familiar with ecclesiastical history, that the periods of the declension of *pure and vital religion* in the church, in all ages, and in all countries, have been characterized by a corresponding laxness in discipline; and that the revival of religion, has been similarly characterized by a revival of the wholesome-discipline which God has instituted for the government of his house.

An example of this, worthy of attention, is recorded by Milner, the historian, in relation to the condition of the church in the third century. "It deserves to be remarked," says he, "that *the first grand and general declension*, after the primary effusion of the divine Spirit, should be fixed about the middle of this century." (Vol. 1, p. 165)

The cause of this declension was the neglect of church discipline, as the Decian persecution was esteemed by Cyprian to be its chastisement. Cyprian was elected bishop of Carthage, A.D. 248. He found the church, at that time, in a wretchedly lapsed and declining condition; and in a treatise concerning the lapse, he said:

"If the cause of our miseries be investigated, the cure may be found. The Lord would have his family to be tried. And *because long peace had corrupted the discipline divinely revealed to us*, the heavenly chastisement hath raised up our faith, which had almost lain dormant: and when, by our sins, we had deserved to suffer still more, the merciful Lord hath so moderated all things, that the whole scene rather deserves the name of a trial, than a persecution." (ibid. p. 165)

Here was the cause of the persecution; and here the consequences of inattention to the discipline of the church. Let it be neglected, and a blighting and a mildew will result, which will not fail, ere long, to induce the divine judgment upon us.

If, therefore, the apostolic injunction—if the authority of the Son of God—if the testimony of ecclesiastical history—if all these together, have any weight—then, by them, "I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them: for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ."

We propose, in this discourse, to describe the characters whom the Scriptures represent as public offenders; and in the next, to inquire what discipline the Scriptures prescribe for such.

I. We are to describe the characters whom the Scriptures represent as public offenders. In the text, a general description of two classes of these is specified: those who produce anti-scriptural schisms in the church, and those who occasion scandal to the cause of Christ. "Mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned."

1. Captious and contentious persons cause divisions contrary to the gospel.

"Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good *conscience*, and faith unfeigned: from which *some* having swerved, *have turned aside unto vain jangling*, desiring to be teachers of the law understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm."

"If any man consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to *the doctrine* which is according to godliness, he is proud, *knowing* nothing, but *doting about questions and strifes of words*, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings—from such withdraw thyself." (I Tim. 6:4, 5)

Seest thou a man heady and high-minded? Seest thou one who refuseth to submit to the authority of the great body? Seest thou one whose whole spirit and deportment are an everlasting protest against the decisions of the majority? One who loveth to have the pre-eminence in all things, who would sooner rend the peace of the whole body, than yield the most trifling matter? Such an one causeth division, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned.

The entire spirit and letter of the sacred volume, so far as relates to the demeanor of Christians, is that of mutual forbearance, concession and submission. In all questions of mere opinion and education—of mere policy and custom—of mere pleasure and expediency—in all questions *where it is perfectly immaterial to our innocence which side we adopt*: as whether we eat one thing or another—whether we follow one fashion or any other, in our dress—whether we worship God in a finely finished house or a log cabin—whether we adopt one mode or any other in the defrayment of our church expenses—whether we assemble on Saturday or any other day, for the transaction of the business of the church—in all such questions as these, *the law of charity*, and the *voice of the majority*, are to be the rule; and any dissention from this, which is persisted in to the grief and annoyance of the body, is a violation of the principles which Christ *has* laid down for the regulation of his church.

Yes, we repeat it, to adopt any indifferent opinion or practice; that is, any opinion or practice which we may either hold or let alone, and still be innocent, and to maintain and pursue this, to the pain and injury of the church, is not only an infringement of the laws of republicanism, which the Bible teaches, but is in fact a sin against Christ. "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not, judge (or condemn) him that eateth."..."But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably."..."It is good neither to eat flesh, nor drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth or is offended, or is made weak."..."When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak consciences, ye sin against Christ."..."Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself."..."Submit yourselves one to another, in the fear of the Lord."..."But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." (Rom. 14:3, 15, 21; I Cor. 8:12; Phil. 2:3; Eph. 5:21; I Cor. 11:16)

2. There is a class of persons, a little dissimilar from these, whom, for the sake of distinction, we denominate, factious. All factious persons cause divisions, contrary to the gospel.

The distinction which we draw between a "captious" and a "factious" person, is this: The one is a man of mere prejudices and prepossessions—the other is a man of party. The one would exclude himself from the society of the faithful, on account of some favorite notion of his own—the other would lead away as many as possible with him. To the latter, allusion is made in the Acts of the Apostles (20:29, 30) in these strong and impressive words: "I know, that after my departure, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."

Not satisfied to occupy their position alone, they will lead away captive as many souls as may fall under their influence. They are men of sour and bitter spirit, and who strive to infuse the same malaria into other hearts also. Their work is discord; and unless restrained, they will diffuse "the leaven of malice and wickedness into the whole lump." Unless suppressed, their evil communications will corrupt the entire body.

Perhaps a faithful minister is the object of their malignancy. In this event, nothing will escape their observation, which may serve to destroy his influence—render useless his preaching—or weaken the force of his example. Haman like, nothing can satisfy their hatred, until they have alienated all hearts, and even compelled the removal of the man of God. Their distempered senses can see nothing good in his best example, nor hear anything good in his soundest doctrine. Like certain contemptible birds, they pass over all that is sound and wholesome, and alight only on such putrid matter as best suits a vitiated appetite. Ever seeking occasion, they delight to turn all hearts from the truths of his lips. To such, the rebuke of St. Paul, to Elymas, the sorcerer, is not too severe, "O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord." (Acts 13:10)

Perhaps the wholesome discipline of the church is the object of their rage. It may have fallen on them, as a chastisement of their own wrongs, or it may have touched some favorite friend. In either event, their malignant spirit is aroused, as the lion in his den, and nothing can be satisfactory but vengeance, wreaked in the injury of the church. They can see no reason—no justice—no religion, in the act. Their discontent is hastily communicated from soul to soul. They devise mischief on their bed; when they awake, they execute it. A faction to rescind that act is the object; and partly of weak members, and partly of men of the world, a faction, if possible, they will create, and labor to reverse the decision, at least in public sentiment. No expedient, that can be of the least avail, will be left untried, to rend the peace of Zion, or to stain the fair escutcheon of the church with disgrace.

My brethren, do not imagine that such men are the creatures of our idle fears. Would to God this were so! Would to God this had always been so! If you have no such characters among you at present, you know not how long it shall be e're such may arise. We have seen the church of God bleeding at every pore, under the ungodly deeds of such ungodly hands. We have seen the pious and faithful ministry crippled and cut down by such men. We have seen the unity and the peace of God's house laid waste by such unhallowed influence. Need you, then, be told that such may arise again? Need you be told that they are grievous and dangerous wolves? Need you be told that you should strictly mark and avoid them? "Of your own selves may men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." To retain such perverse speakers in the bosom of the church—to lend the weight of your fellowship to their pernicious course is to be partaker of their sin. No, my brethren; mark them who cause such divisions, contrary to the gospel, and avoid them.

But were we to confine this caution to those who are, or have been, members of the same church with yourselves, perhaps we should be unfaithful, both to you and to sense of the Apostle. Perhaps he would have you cautioned against the unhallowed influence of those without your communion also, by whom it is attempted to alienate your hearts from the right way. If the Apostle said, that of your own selves would bad men arise to draw away many; he also said, that "grievous wolves would enter in among you, not sparing the flock." Against such you need to be admonished. For, although they may not now infest your fold, you can never tell how soon they may do so. These are strange times on which we have fallen.

The spirit of party is rife in the land; and it is the disgrace of the Christian name, that it is so common in the church of God. Every year attests instances, in which, from motives of jealousy or suspicion, or dread, some faithful minister is publicly or privately abused—the church of God abused—members set against their pastor, or against each other, and eventually, the harmony, the strength, and the success of the whole, impaired and destroyed. Mark those who perform such unholy deeds, and avoid them. "They zealously affect you but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them." (Gal. 4:17) It is not your good which such seek; it is not the good of your church which they seek. Yes, lay it down as a truth, when men whisper a word to the disparagement of the pastor of your church, when the drift of their words is to set brother at variance with brother, whatever may be their pretensions toward you or your church, they are insidious enemies to both. "Mark them and avoid them." But...

3. Our text has reference to heretics. Heretics cause divisions contrary to the gospel. By a heretic in this place, we mean those who would subvert the well-known and established doctrines and practices of the church.

Every society of Christians is formed upon the supposition of a certain unity, in regard to some leading points, both of faith and practice. "How shall two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3) And while, from the difference of education, and customs, and association, it can hardly be expected, that all should precisely agree in every little matter; yet, surely we have the right to expect those who connect themselves with our communion, to adopt all the leading, the essential and vital points, both of our practice and our doctrines. Has the blessed God laid down the same maxims for the

whole human race—an innumerable multitude, and required all, upon the severest penalty, to adopt them? And shall not we require, at least those who connect themselves with our church, to adopt all the leading of those maxims? Surely this is not too much. "If then, any man come unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house; neither bid him God speed." (2 John 10)

Another thought presents itself here, which may well serve to impress upon your minds the importance of vigilance on this subject: it is the present condition of our churches. Large multitudes are joining us every year. Many of these bring with them certain peculiarities, which we do not admit into our creed, and which would be fatal if they were admitted into it. Not a few of our members are but partially instructed—some of our ministry, either for the want of education, or time to devote to it, fail, sufficiently to expound and establish some of the leading points held by us—we have, comparatively, but a few copies of our "Confession of Faith," where, in a small compass, an inquirer may learn what we hold, with the reasons of it—some there are who would destroy even those few: and from all these facts together, it must appear obvious that our whole body lies bare to heresies. But, brethren, let us not presume too far upon the goodness of God.

"Let us watch diligently, lest any root of bitterness springing up, trouble us."..."An heretic, after the first or second admonition, reject."..."His words will eat as doth a canker."..."With good words and fair speeches, he will deceive the hearts of the simple."..."Many shall follow his pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of."..."Mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them: they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ." (Heb. 12:15; Tit. 3:10; 2 Tim. 2:17; Rom. 16:18; 2 Pet. 2:2)

Permit us, beloved brethren, before we dismiss this branch of our discourse, to call up again, to your recollection, the positions we have assumed, and the declarations we have made. We said that *captiousness* should not be indulged in members of the church; and that however trifling or indifferent might be the requisition of the church, if its peace and happiness depend upon it, the law of charity requires each and all of its members to comply, and that an obstinate refusal of any member to do so, would be censurable offence.

We said also, that *factiousness* must be guarded against, and that in all or every instance, either in the church or out of it, that person must be "marked" and "avoided," who should labor to prejudice the members of a church against their pastor, or against each other. And, lastly, we said we should use all diligence to suppress any heresies that may appear among us, whether they respect our established usages, or our doctrines: that no confidence—no friendship which we may entertain for the person, the motive, or the ability of the offender, can justify a neglect of duty in these things.

II. Let us now proceed to the consideration of the *second* general description of offenders, specified in the text. They are such as bring scandal upon the cause of Christ. They are such as cannot be retained in church membership, but at the sacrifice of the reputation of the church. Whatever may seem to be the present and immediate bearings of such persons, on the cause of religion, they serve not our Lord Jesus Christ—their ultimate bearings are against Christianity.

The immediate and particular consequence of their retention, may be a larger number in the church, or some worldly influence to the denomination, but the general and remote consequence, will be the practical abolishment of the principle which requires all church members to live humbly, holy, and unblamably—to "let their light so shine before men, that others may see their good works and glorify their father which is in heaven." Therefore, mark them which cause offences, (scandals) also, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.

Under this general description, are included all those who openly and intentionally violate the principles contained in the Decalogue. The Ten Commandments embrace all the fundamental articles of the moral government of God. They are the basis—they are the rule and measure of all the moral and religious conduct in the universe. Hence they can never be abrogated. As a rule of action, they can never be abolished. Although the law is not the terms of salvation, still, all those who are redeemed, and those who are not, will be under perpetual obligation to observe it. Never can it be right to do what it forbids, or neglect to do what it requires. It can never be right to worship idols—to profane the name of God—to lie—to steal—to kill—to commit adultery—to desecrate the Sabbath—to covet that which belongs to another.

These principles are equally binding on Christians, as on others: and equally binding on all now, as though Jesus Christ had never come into the world to redeem mankind. No redemption price which heaven has bestowed on man—no price of

redemption which heaven can bestow on man, can purchase for him the privilege to violate them. It is presumption—it is not piety, to say, that “inasmuch as we are not saved by works of the law, therefore we are under no obligation to keep the law.” To assume the liberty to sin, because “we are not under the law, but under grace,” is to “turn the grace of God into lasciviousness.” Shall we “sin because grace hath abounded, or in order that grace may yet more abound?”...“This were iniquity to be reprov’d.”...“I have written unto you,” said *the* apostle, “not to keep company, if any man that is 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)

Lewd and lascivious practices, in our intercourse one with another, are also forbidden by the Decalogue. If these crimes are not so common among Christian people, as some others, yet they have been too frequent, in some places of late, to be passed in entire silence. This was the leading sin of the Nicolaitans, “which thing,” said the Son of God, “I hate.” Fornication and adultery are crying sins, which it behooves every Christian and every good man, in the community, to frown down in the most uncompromising manner. Such offenders have no inheritance in the kingdom of heaven. “Therefore, put away that wicked person from among you.” (I Cor. 5:13)

Drunkenness is another public offence that must not pass unnoticed. “Drunkenness,” said the excellent Andrew Fuller, “is a sin which involves in it, a violation of the whole law, which requires love to God—to our fellow-men and to ourselves. The *first* as abusing his mercies; the *second* as depriving those who are in want of them, of the necessaries of life, as well as of setting a bad example; the *third* as depriving ourselves of reason—of self-respect—and common decency.” (Gen. 9:20-23)

Idleness, laziness, neglect of business, is also a violation of the divine law. That law which requires us to do no work on the Sabbath, we nor our son, nor our daughter, nor our man-servant, nor our maid-servant, also commands that six days we shall work and do all our business. (Ex. 20:9) Under the new dispensation, the principle was repeated, thus: “Be not slothful in business.” (Rom. 12:11) It has been quaintly said, “an idle man’s brain is the devil’s workshop”—and everybody knows the truth of the old adage, “idleness produces want, vice and misery.”

Hence, in the apostolic style, to be an idler was to be “disorderly.” “We hear,” said he, “that there are some which walk disorderly among you, working not at all, but are busy bodies. Now, them that are such we command and exhort, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread.” (2 Thess. 3:11, 12) It is true the Bible does not define the particular employment which each must pursue. This is left to every man’s choice, and to every man’s necessities. But it does require that every man, adopting some honest and moral pursuit, should “be diligent in business.” “Let him labor, working with his hands, the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” (Eph. 4:28)

Once more, extortion is a public offence, which requires the act of putting out. Extortion is to take advantage of a fellow-man’s necessities, and compel him to pay more than is lawful for money, or to part with his property for less than its value. It is to take of thy neighbor without giving him an equivalent for that which you receive. It is “to grind the face of the poor”—“to oppress him in his cause,” whether by usury or other means. The apostle says, “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)

Such, then, are the public offences which the moral law and the whole Christian economy regard as sinful. Which of them is there, which a religious man may commit, and not bring scandal upon the cause of Christ? Is it idolatry? Profanity? Lying? Stealing? Murder? Lewdness? Dishonesty? Drunkenness? Extortion? Which is it that is not disgraceful to the Christian name? Mark them which cause such offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.

Nor is it necessary that all these sins should be found upon any one member of the church. If any one of them attach to his character, it is sufficient for all the purposes of discipline. Note how the apostle speaks, “I have written you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous, *or* a railer, or a drunkard, *or* an extortioner, with such an one, no not to eat.” This is the general style of the Scriptures. When they enumerate the virtues necessary to Christianity, they connect them by copulative conjunctions, but when they describe the vices to be avoided, they connect them by disjunctives. To be a good man, one must add all that is good in his composition, but to be a bad man, one evil is sufficient.

Nor is it even necessary that *one offence be habitual*. As in common life, *one criminal act* is enough to convict a man, so in religion. To kill once, to lie once, to get drunk once, to steal once, to commit any scandalous offence once, is sufficient to demand your action. The Bible nowhere rests the disciplining of a gross and willful transgressor upon habitual wickedness. But throughout, it inculcates the sentiment of the text: "Mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them: for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ."



Good Works

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In the Catholic Church some of the saints, it is supposed, performed more acts of obedience and charity than God demanded; these, for that reason, were called works of *supererogation*, and it was imagined that the grand aggregate of such good works constituted a treasury of merits, which the popes, as heads of the church, could transfer by indulgences to those whose guilty lives created a demand for them.

Among Mohammedans, it is taught that on the Day of Judgment the good works of a true believer will be placed in one scale and his sins in another, and if the former outweigh the latter the man will be saved. Among the Burmese, the chief business of a pious man is to acquire merit; for this object he gives alms, attends to religious duties, and subjects himself to much self-denial.

Without reference to motives, almsgiving, patriotism, patience, kindness to the sick, and the worship of God seem good works; but to be sure of their real character we must know that they come from worthy motives. There can be no doubt about the excellency of the works that spring from affection to Jesus; he says, "If ye love me keep my commandments."

If, because we cherish him in our hearts, we hearken to his teachings, obey his precepts, and bear the fruits of "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance," then are we led by the Spirit of God. The Christian's controlling motive should ever be supreme love to the Lord Jesus. This will give the royal stamp of divine approbation to his works.

Good works are necessary to prove the new birth of a believer, and his freedom from the dominion of iniquity. "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit," says Jesus, "he taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." The heavenly husbandman, when he saw that the barren fig-tree in his vineyard was fruitless for the third year, said, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?"

The good works of a Christian have no part in his justification, "Therefore, we conclude," says Paul, "that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." This inspired conclusion of the great apostle is infallible. "It is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy He saves us."

The sufferings of Jesus are the Christian's justification,—his complete salvation. There can be no works of *supererogation*,—works beyond what God demands; where much is given much will be required. Jesus claims the love of our whole heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. We ought to be living sacrifices, lying every moment upon his altar, and wholly consecrated to him. We owe him this, and no work or woe of ours can ever exceed his constant claims.

