

The Church: Its Discipline

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From *The Church: Its Polity and Ordinances*, 1879

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Discipline includes all those processes by which a church, as entrusted with the care of souls, educates its members for heaven; such as their public and private instruction in the gospel, the maintenance of social meetings for their edification and comfort, and, in general, the cultivation of a spirit adapted to awaken and cherish the Christian life.

In this lies the chief power of a church. A pure and healthful tone of religious life in the body, an all-pervasive spirit of love and loyalty to Christ and the church, are the most effective means of securing a pure life in the individual members; for the church is then a spiritual magnet to draw and hold souls to Christ and to itself.

But discipline, in a narrower sense, denotes the action of the church, whether as individuals or as a body, in reference to offences committed against the laws of Christ. In this sense it includes:

I. THE MUTUAL WATCH-CARE OF THE MEMBERS BY ENCOURAGEMENT, COUNSEL, ADMONITION, AND REBUKE.

This is individual and private, and is a preventive of offences. Were this done, and done in the tender, loving, earnest spirit of religion, few instances of further discipline would be required. A true Christian watch-care, or mutual helpfulness in the members, is the highest development of church-life. David said, "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my

head." (Ps. 141:5)

And the gospel enjoins, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such as are in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself; lest thou also be tempted." (Gal. 6:1)

"Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." (Col. 3:12-14)

Wherever the church-life approximates to this grand ideal the spiritual atmosphere is charged with such vitalizing forces that every soul within it is girt about with spiritual power, and is inspired to higher and holier living.

II. THE ADJUSTMENT OF PRIVATE PERSONAL GRIEVANCES.

The following directions are here given by Christ:

"If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between him and thee alone: if he shall hear thee, thou shalt have gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." (Matt. 18:15-17)

Here mark:

1. The aggrieved party, if the other does not, is to take the initiative in seeking an interview; the subject and the interview are to be strictly private; the object of it is, not altercation, but to gain an offending brother.
2. If this fails, and the offence is susceptible of proof, then one or two judicious fellow-members are to be chosen as witnesses and mediators, and the whole case is to be considered before them.
3. If this fails, the case, after due notification of the parties, is to be laid before the church, the proof adduced, and opportunity given for defence; and if the offence is proven, the offender is to be required to make reparation or be excluded.

Several further points are to be noted:

1. The aggrieved person has no discretion whether to take this course or bear the wrong. It is obligatory, and he becomes an offender if he fails to do so. For this law is imperative, and even the Mosaic law enjoined: "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him" (Lev. 19:17).
2. If in the private interview the offence is denied, and there are no witnesses of the offence, the second step cannot be taken; for in that case the complaining party would become an offender, having published a charge which is without proof. In the absence of proof, he has no resource but in private admonition, and the patient committal of the matter to Providence.
3. If the "one or two more" before whom, in the second step, the case is laid regard the grievance as not real or as satisfactorily removed, the aggrieved party, though unsatisfied, cannot take the third step; for the offender has "heard them," and the accuser ought to be satisfied with the judgment of brethren selected by himself.
4. It is plain that if this great law of Christ were perfectly executed, there could be no personal feuds in the church; its simple provisions completely banish them, and wherever intestine strifes are found destroying the life of a church, they only attest the disastrous results of disregarding the words of the Head of the church.

III. THE ADJUSTMENT OF DIFFERENCES AFFECTING WORLDLY AFFAIRS.

The Christian law, as given I Cor. 6:1-11, enjoins that differences among members be not carried before worldly courts, but be referred to the judgment of judicious members of the church. It has been objected that this course was required in the midst of a heathen civilization, but cannot be regarded as obligatory in a Christian land, and under laws and courts formed by a Christian civilization.

But the passage gives no intimation of the limitation of the rule to heathen countries; on the contrary, the reasons it assigns for the law are in their nature not transient and local, but permanent and universal.

These are:

1. That Christians, who are ultimately to judge the world, and even angels, are better qualified to adjudicate these differences than worldly tribunals, and
2. That the appearance of members of the church as litigants before a worldly court is itself unseemly, and is inconsistent with their professed relations and hopes as members of Christ's body. These reasons are of permanent force. Differences among men are often decided, in human law, not according to equity, but by legal technicalities; this rule was intended to secure a judgment according to equity and the spirit of Christianity.

IV. PROCEDURE IN CASES OF PUBLIC OFFENCE, EMBRACING ALL OFFENCES AGAINST THE FAITH AND LIFE REQUIRED IN A CHURCH MEMBER, such as immoralities, heresy, covetousness, the making of divisions, habitual neglect of covenanted duties, and persistent violation of church order.

In the apostolic churches the elders, as overseers—rulers—of the flock, had the special responsibility of maintaining the discipline of the church. This is implied in Paul's address to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20), and in the qualification for the eldership stated I Tim. 4:4, 5: "One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity: for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?"

The method of procedure indicated (Matt. 18:15-17), though there applied only to cases of personal grievance, is doubtless in spirit to be observed in all cases; for, in Titus 3:10, it is directed that the heretic be excluded only "after the first and second admonitions." The process, then, would be substantially this:

1. The officers, becoming aware of reports implicating a member, would proceed privately to investigate them, and, if found true, would endeavor to reclaim. This is the most important step, since, if taken tenderly and privately, it is generally effectual.
2. The first effort failing, another would be made with every additional appliance which Christian fidelity and kindness could suggest.
3. This also failing, they would bring the case before the church with all the evidence; and if their statement of the case was controverted, the accused would have full opportunity for defence. The church would then decide, and, if adversely to the accused, they would require reparation or would proceed to exclusion.

The following points are here to be observed:

1. The rules of evidence which obtain in courts of law, since they are founded on essential justice, must govern in the reception of evidence in a trial before the church, except that the witnesses are not placed under oath; no evidence, therefore, which would be rejected in a legal trial can be accepted by a church. The application of this rule is especially important, since in cases of church scandal the popular gossip is so often mistaken for solid evidence.
2. In case of gross immorality, where the evidence is public and unmistakable, the exclusion is immediate and without formal trial, and the steps to bring the offender to repentance and restoration are taken afterward. This is evidently the course pursued in the case of the incestuous person described I Cor. 5 and II Cor. 2:1-11. The ground of this summary procedure is that the circumstances are such as to make confession worthless as evidence of penitence; only a subsequent life of purity can furnish this evidence. The church, however, is bound to use every effort afterward to save and restore those thus excluded. In this duty there is too often a lamentable failure, and the offender, whom persistent love and kindness might have reclaimed, is left by neglect to perish in his sin.

3. In our churches, as now organized without a plural eldership, the initiation of discipline commonly devolves on the pastors and deacons, who constitute practically, for this and other purposes, a church presbytery. In some churches there is a standing committee of discipline, on whom this responsibility rests. In others no definite arrangement exists, and it is left to any member to bring offences to the notice of the church; too often, from lack of early and private attention to offenders, the case has gone so far that the public discipline, when instituted, is almost necessarily unavailing to reclaim.

Exclusion is the final act of church power. It is the solemn withdrawal of fellowship from the offender, by which he ceases to be a member and is placed back in the world. Its effect on reputation, however, is modified by the nature of the offence requiring it. Hence, a distinction is sometimes made in the form of the act.

In cases of vital error or immorality, involving the forfeiture of Christian character, the hand of Christian fellowship is withdrawn; while in cases of the violation of church order and of other offences, where the substance of Christian character may remain unimpeached, the hand of church fellowship is withdrawn. This, however, is a matter of mere custom; in any case, the formal relation of the excluded person as a member of the church is terminated.

The discipline of a minister is peculiar in two respects:

1. An accusation is to be received with unusual caution, both because his position creates a presumption in his favor, and because, as a minister, he is peculiarly exposed to malice. Paul enjoined: "Against an elder receive not an accusation but before two or three witnesses." (1 Tim. 5:19)

2. The action of a Council, as it was had to invest him with the ministerial office, should also be had to divest him of it. When, therefore, charges are preferred against a minister, it is the duty of the church so far to examine them as to determine whether the case is sufficiently serious to require an investigation; and, in the event of it so appearing, the church is then to summon a Council to investigate the charges.

If the trial results in a conviction, the Council first proceeds to withdraw from him what the ordaining Council had imparted—that is, the fellowship, on the part of the ministry and churches, for him as a minister of the gospel, and the authority to exercise among them the functions of the sacred office; and it then advises the church to divest him of his pastoral office, his license, and his membership. These, as they were originally conferred by the church, can only be withdrawn by it; in reference to them, the action of the Council is only advisory.

A scriptural discipline, administered with tenderness and fidelity, is of the highest moment for the welfare of the church. It is an urgent necessity alike for the help of individual souls and for the purity, peace, and moral power of the body. Disorderly, inconsistent life in the church paralyzes the power of the pulpit; no other cause, probably, is so potent for evil in the churches as the general neglect of a true church discipline.



DEATH BY ADAM, LIFE BY CHRIST

From The Baptist Manual, 1849

Our state by nature makes us tremble; but the grace of God, in Christ Jesus, gives us consolation. Oh! How precious and sweet must the gift of Jesus Christ unto eternal life be to us; when we rightly consider the sin of Adam, which bath reigned unto death! (Rom. 5:14) Let us, with faith and repentance, embrace our Saviour, who came to deliver us from the consequences of the fall, and from sin and death, to destroy the works of the devil, and to bruise the Serpent's head.

Adam, by his fall, plunged us into misery; let us now fly to Jesus, who bath redeemed and saved us. Let us cast ourselves into His arms. He will sprinkle us with the blood of atonement for our sins, and bestow on us grace sufficient to change our hearts, and to establish them; a covenant firmer than that of nature; a happiness more lasting than that of the state of innocence.

Why Aren't Baptist Churches Thriving? _____

Davis W. Huckabee

From *Sermons to Baptist Churches*

This is a question that is sometimes asked of us. Often it is asked in all honesty, while at other times it is asked by way of reproach, as intimating that they are not thriving, and that this very fact is an evidence that God's blessing is not upon them. There is a natural tendency on the part of less spiritual people to judge by outward appearances, which are often deceiving. Again, it is easy to make a judgment on the basis of only a partial knowledge, and some persons, judging all independent Baptists by one or two churches, come to a mistaken idea of their prosperity. If one had done this in New Testament days, and judged all churches by the small, weak and unprosperous church at Athens [if indeed there even existed a church there], (Acts 17:32-34), what a mistaken view he would have had.

Or if one had judged the morals and spirituality of all the churches in the first century by the carnal Corinthian church, how far wrong would his impression have been. Or if one had judged the zeal of all the first century churches by that of the lukewarm Ephesian church in the last days of the apostolic era, (Rev. 2:1-7), he would have been greatly deceived. Or, by contrast, if one had judged by the materially prosperous, but practically dead, Laodicean church, (Rev. 3:14-18), how erroneous would his judgment have been.

It is tragic to see any Baptist church succumb to the gates of Hades, or to be overcome by the Wicked One so that it ceases to exist. Yet, in all honesty it must be confessed that there are instances where the best thing for the Lord's cause would be if some nominal Baptist churches that are doing nothing but bringing reproach on the name of the Lord by their lifestyles, would die, and make room for others that would faithfully serve the Lord. Any church which has lost its vision, or forgotten its purpose, or ignored its commission, or become wholly self-serving, has become a liability so far as the Lord's cause is concerned, and would probably be better off dead if it will not "repent and do the first works," (Rev. 2:5).

Throughout this writer's ministry of over forty years, he has pastored only small, independent Baptist churches. His first pastorate of ten years was in a church that, in its almost sixty years of existence had never had over one hundred persons on the membership roll at any given time, and some might judge from this that there was clear evidence that God was not blessing it. Yet this church was the largest Baptist church in a rather large county, and was the largest Baptist church within fifty or seventy-five miles.

If one judged the Baptist churches in that part of eastern Colorado by their numbers, he must conclude that none of them were pleasing the Lord. But that part of the United States has never been such a Baptist stronghold as the part of the South where this writer grew up. There, within a twenty mile radius, there might be as many Baptist churches, and most of them larger in numbers and wealthier in circumstances than this one. And similar facts are true of this writer's two subsequent pastorates, yet all three of these fulfilled their God-given purposes, though they were small. Perhaps the Lord's statement to Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:7 could be adapted to churches as well.

Therefore, in seeking an answer to the question at the head of this article, we must look elsewhere than in mere numbers, wealth and worldly respectability for the answer, for these are not the determining factors in the matter. In seeking an answer to this question, we begin by—

I. DEFINING THE MEANING OF THE TERMS.

There are many Baptist organizations in existence today, and whether they be the Southern Baptist Convention, the American Baptist Association, the Conservative Baptist Association, the Bible Baptist Fellowship, the General Association of Regular Baptists, the World Baptist Fellowship, or any one of the several other organizations, they all claim that their churches are "independent." This makes it evident that most Baptists realize that New Testament churches were

independent, and that all Baptist churches today ought to be independent. But what most do not realize is, that independency does not consist in terms, but in practice.

There is even one Baptist organization that calls itself "The New Testament Association of Independent Baptist Churches," which is a contradiction in terms, and concerning which M. L. Moser, Jr., has well said that:

"I cannot understand how they can be 'independent' and yet members of an association. If one is an independent Baptist he is not a member of any organization, and when one becomes a member of an association, convention, or organized fellowship, he thereby ceases to be independent.—Editorial comment in *The Baptist Challenge*, June, 1969, p. 5.

Inasmuch as all Baptists, with few exceptions, confess that scriptural Baptist churches must be independent, they concede the claims of true independent Baptists, who believe that "independent" means, not only "not dependent upon," but also "unaffiliated," "not connected or related organizationally," "self-sufficient," etc., as the dictionary defines the term. Therefore, when we speak of "independent" Baptist churches, we are referring to such Baptist churches as are unaffiliated with any religious organizations such as Conventions, Associations, Fellowships, etc. It is these churches that are sometimes thought to be slowly dying on the vine because nothing is heard from them by way of advertisement of their doings. But this is no proof that they are not healthy and thriving spiritually.

In defining what we mean by "Independent" Baptists, the writer would take the liberty of quoting his own personal reasons for being independent, as first set forth in the church bulletin of the First Baptist Church of Kirk, Colorado:

1. We are independent (unaffiliated) Baptists, not because we bear any ill feeling toward our brethren who are in Baptist Organizations, but because we do not find any such super-church organizations uniting the churches of the New Testament together.
2. Neither do we believe that any such organization is necessary to the fulfillment of the churches' obligations. To hold such a view is to indict the wisdom of God as inadequate for the contingencies of the twentieth century.
3. We are independent because the churches of the New Testament were, and they not only were able to discharge their responsibilities to the Lord, but enjoyed such success as has never been seen since the first century.
4. We are independent because we believe that any church that is indwelt by the Divine Comforter can realize its responsibilities without any suggestions, and fulfill them without any help, from any outside organization.
5. We are independent because all super-church organizations siphon off too much mission money for their own maintenance. Independent Baptist Churches, having no such organization to support, are able to put 100% of their mission funds on the mission field.
6. We are independent because membership in such organizations tends to cause individual churches to shirk their duty on the supposition that the organization will take care of it even if they do not. As members of such an organization, it is too easy to excuse the church from its duty by saying, "We are only one church, and not a large nor rich one at that." Independent Baptists believe that each church is solely responsible for its duties, and that it alone can fulfill its responsibilities.
7. We are independent because such super-church organizations encourage, by their size, numbers and human strength, a dependence upon the arm of the flesh instead of upon the Spirit of God.

Again, we must define what we mean by the word "thriving." To different people this word might have different shades of meaning, but generally it will carry the meaning of increasing in size and vigor, or increasing in numbers. Taking the word in

this sense then, we believe that this question which is sometimes asked is not appropriate, for independent Baptists are flourishing as well as any comparative number of organized Baptists, and perhaps more than many of them. It is certain that independent Baptists of the present are thriving more than they have since many years prior to the advent of the first Baptist super-church organization.

What most Baptist laymen do not realize, is that all Baptist Conventions, Associations, Fellowships, etc., are of quite recent vintage, and that for the first seventeen hundred years of the Christian era there were very few, if any, other kinds of Baptists but independent Baptists. Dr. Mosheim says of the churches of the second century:

"During a great part of this century, the Christian churches were independent with respect to each other. Nor were they joined by association, confederacy, or any other bonds than those of charity. Each Christian assembly was a little state, governed by its own laws, which were either enacted, or at least, approved by the society. But, in process of time, all the Christian churches of a province were formed into one large ecclesiastical body, which, like confederate states, assembled at certain times in order to deliberate about the common interests of the whole." (*Ecclesiastical History, Century 2, Part II, chap. II, para. 2*)

This amalgamation of the churches which eventually came about, was the beginning of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy, yet how remarkably similar is it to many of the modern Baptist organizations. The true churches continued to be independent of one another until early in the eighteenth century in all but a few instances. The Novatian churches, which flourished from the third to the seventh centuries, were independent of one another, and for this reason, they were stigmatized as schismatics by Catholics. Indeed the independency of these churches is the third of the four principle tenets that differentiated the Novatianist churches from the Catholics, according to the French historian Crispin.

The first Baptist Organization that achieved any great degree of prominence was the Philadelphia Baptist Association, which was organized in 1707 by seven churches in Pennsylvania and New Jersey (Thomas Armitage, *History of Baptists*, p. 715). Initially this was done primarily to promote fellowship between churches. The earliest of the presently existing Baptist Organizations, the Southern Baptist Convention, was organized in 1845, being formed out of the old Baptist Triennial Convention, which had been formed in 1814 (W. W. Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, p. 12ff).

It is clear from history that independent Baptist churches are not something new, but are actually as old as the Christian religion itself. But because so many of the churches had become negligent about mission work by the early seventeen hundreds, many concerned individuals sought to stir up the churches to their duty. Their mistake lay in a false ecclesiology. They assumed that because so many churches were not discharging the Great Commission so far as missions were concerned that they could not do so apart from some extra-church mission board. And so, the first Baptist organizations came into existence for the purpose of promoting mission work.

However, it has been abundantly proven, both in New Testament times, and in recent years, that independent Baptists can do any kind of mission work that any Convention or Association can, and they will do it with greater efficiency. Greater, in some cases, by their own admission, by as much as ninety percent, for some years ago the Southern Baptist Convention admitted that "less than ten percent of mission funds ever reach the mission field" in their organization. It is shameful to waste ninety percent of missionary support just to get one on the field, when he can be scripturally sent out and given one hundred percent of the money designated for missions if done Scripturally. What businessman would tolerate for a moment any enterprise that was only ten percent efficient? But our question is "Why Aren't Independent Baptists Thriving?" and so we must get back to this original question and examine it by—

II. DETERMINING THE MATTER AT HAND.

The charge intimated in this question is that independent Baptists are not thriving, but is this true? Not at all! It is simply a matter of the independent Baptists not having a loud "horn tooter" to let the world know what they are doing. Almost every Baptist super-church organization has an "official organ" that spends much time and money boasting of how much money it has collected for the missionaries, how many churches it has organized, how much money it has spent on

publications, seminaries, etc. But independent Baptist churches, being not bound together by any sort of organization, may not even know of the existence of another independent church in the same city. Thus they have no way of gathering information about their various accomplishments, their mission outlay, their mission support, their home missions, etc.

However, if this information were all correlated, it would doubtless surprise everyone. This writer is constantly amazed when he visits a new area of the country to find that there is there a nucleus of independent Baptist churches functioning efficiently for the Lord. Yet these are often unaware of like centers of independent Baptist work in other areas. And this is probably good, for it prevents independent Baptist churches getting so occupied with tooting their own horns that they get sidetracked from their primary work. It is in the nature of the flesh to glory in its own accomplishments, often to the detriment of the Lord's work, so ignorance of much of the Lord's workings through independent Baptists may be a good thing. At the judgment seat of Christ, when the all-seeing Eye of God that has taken account of everyone's doings reveals all that has been obediently done, we will learn soon enough of the full extent of what has been accomplished by adhering to the Scriptural plan for missions. Then all obedience to Scripture will be justified.

But apart from foreign and home mission enterprises, independent Baptist churches may appear to not be thriving because they are generally smaller in number than churches that belong to Baptist organizations. The fact that they are often smaller must not be attributed to a lack of zeal upon their part, for often the opposite is the case. Believing as most do that purity is more important than numbers, most independent Baptist churches are more discriminating in the reception of members than organizational Baptists.

In some parts of this nation of ours the name Baptist has all but lost its meaning because of the willingness, yes, rather the fervent desire to drag anyone into the membership of the church on almost any terms. Thus, many so-called Baptist churches have ceased even to inquire what kind of a baptism a person has before receiving him into the membership of the church. And while this is not generally the case with most organizational Baptists in the South, yet it is true that many of the Baptist churches of the south, in their zeal for numbers have ceased altogether to exercise any church discipline upon erring members. Once, an independent Baptist church in Texas had to exclude some erring members. A member of the First Baptist Church of the same city, which belonged to a Baptist organization, hearing of this, admitted that his church could not exclude any of its members, "for if we ever started, there would be no stopping place." This is a shameful admission for a church to make.

If an independent Baptist church is being faithful to the Lord, there will be times when it must exclude from its membership persons who are guilty of the sins listed in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6, and in other places. This may appear to cut back the growth of the church for a time, but it is certain that such "prunings" cause the church's growth to be healthier and more enduring. Such faithfulness to the principles of the Word of God discourages any pretentious, superficial or careless Christians from uniting themselves to such a church. But these sorts never help a church anyhow, but rather they do a great deal of harm to the reputation of the church.

Thus, such a faithful church cannot expect to be popular with the masses of nominal Christians, nor can it ever expect to become the "prestige" church in its town. The "prestige" church is always the one "big" church, which, by its very size and prominence, is joined by everyone that is interested only in what the church can do for him socially, politically and financially. Almost every town and city in America has such a "prestige" church, and tragically, it is sometimes a Baptist church, but if it is, it is so for the simple reason that the church has compromised for the sake of numbers or for other unworthy reasons.

Again, it may be so that a church is thriving spiritually even when it is not gaining any significant numbers, for there are times of sowing and watering the seed, as well as times of reaping the sheaves. Though humorous, it is true what a preacher said when asked about a revival going on in his church. When he accounted it to be a great revival, he was asked how many new members had been gained. He answered, "None! But we got rid of several worthless members." There may be a revival when numbers are reduced. Remember Gideon's Three Hundred? (Judges 7:2ff). And that church is in a thriving condition which is being faithful to the Lord, whatever appearances may be to the contrary.

Too many people have the idea that the Lord looks upon matters the same way that they do, and that He will be beguiled with large numbers added to the church membership, without much concern for their character. But the Word declares that faithfulness, not accomplishment, is the criterion in God's judgment of the matter. "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). Let us strive for faithfulness to the Lord, and leave the accomplishment of results to Him, for that is not really our business anyhow. There are several eminent Bible characters that are renowned for faithfulness but who had few if any converts to their faithful preaching. Two of the most prominent are Noah and Jeremiah.

If it is true that this dispensation is rapidly drawing to a close, then we may question whether any church which is faithfully preaching the Word is going to see any great accession of souls to its membership. The very spirit of the present age is against such an expectation. The membership of heretical churches is greatly increasing, but few true churches are. Did not Jesus suggest the scarcity of true believers on earth at His return when He asked: "Howbeit when the Son of man cometh, shall he find the faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8), as is the literal rendering of the Greek text. Paul was also inspired to declare the same thing when he said "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (2 Tim. 4:3). The present milksop Christianity looks remarkably like the fulfillment of this prophecy. One is not to expect the stars to grow brighter as the sun dawns, but rather the converse, and Christ's return is likened to the sunrise in Malachi 4:2.

Once more, in considering this question, we would not be wholly apologetic of independent Baptists, for there is also the—

III. DEPRECATING OF SOME MISTAKEN PRACTICES.

We must never, on the plea that the age-end conditions makes impossible any church growth, be content to let down on our responsibilities to preach and to teach the truth. Several of the accounts of the Great Commission enjoin responsibility without promising any accomplishments therefrom. Thus it is in Luke 24:46-49, where the promise is only that they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit so as to be witnesses of Jesus. See also Acts 1:4-8. Our responsibility in the matter is to be faithful. Accomplishment is the Lord's business. Thus while we are not to let down upon our responsibility to faithfully teach and preach the Word, yet we must not be mistaken.

It is not our business to make the application of the Word to the individual, to persuade, harass and nag him until he makes a profession of faith and comes into the church. Untold harm has been done by over-zealous persons who usurped the Holy Spirit's work of conviction, calling and conversion. It is all too easy to labor in the wisdom and strength of the flesh so as to intellectually persuade a lost person to make a profession of faith (often for questionable motives) and to join the church when that one has never been genuinely born again. We must recognize that God is sovereign in salvation, for men are born again "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). Neither the will of the evangelist or of the lost person can convert him if the Spirit of God is not working.

Every independent Baptist ought to fervently desire to be used of the Lord in witnessing to the lost of the saving grace of God. Yet he must recognize that there will be times when he sees no outward results, but if he is personally faithful to his task, then he shall prosper spiritually and be blessed of the Lord.

Though we rejoice in the faithfulness of many independent Baptists to the Great Commission in their local evangelistic efforts, and in their support of missionaries on the home and foreign fields, yet there is still too often the failure to support the work as we should. Let us be honest. Not one of us is sacrificing for the furtherance of the cause of God and truth, and not until we are will there be room for praise. Most independent Baptists do not give as much per week for the furtherance of the Gospel as they spend for cigarettes, candy, soda pop, trashy magazines, hair-dos, fashionable clothes, and other such rubbish which must all be left behind when we quit this earth. We heartily deprecate the great waste of money that the Lord has given to us to use as His stewards, for nothing that is given to us is solely for our own pleasures. All is to be used for the glory of God.

There are also some ways in which independent Baptist have failed to secure greater spiritual prosperity and doctrinal soundness. One of these is in the failure to have an independent Baptist publishing house, so that, for the most part, independent Baptists are dependent upon organizational Baptists, and even on non-Baptists, for most of their literature. Paul put a great deal of emphasis upon the need of doctrinal soundness when he wrote to Timothy and Titus. Indeed, he put more emphasis on doctrine than he did upon evangelism. Why is this? Because a doctrinally sound people will generally be evangelistically fervent also, and more important, their lives will also teach. But where a church is doctrinally weak or unsound, evangelism cannot long be right and fervent.

There are many independent Baptist pastors that have done extensive study in some field, and yet they cannot find a publisher for their material, and they cannot afford to publish it themselves. Many Baptist publishers will turn down such material because it is independent in its appeal, and consequently of no commercial value to them. It is the writer's opinion that independent Baptists have signally failed in not recognizing that an independent Baptist publishing house would be a great instrument for the furtherance of the truth, and a worthy mission project.

There can never be the doctrinal soundness among them until provision is made for the publishing of good sound books and teaching material on theology, church history, the ordinances, Biblical missions, etc. One hundred years from now, should the Lord tarry His coming, it is questionable whether anyone would even know of the vast numbers of independent Baptists that live today, for the simple reason that they have so far left very little written evidences of their beliefs and practices. Books are generally the only lasting evidences of the existence of a separate people.

The average independent Baptist layman of the present day has only a very hazy notion of why his church is independent. This finds explanation in the fact that he spends more time watching the "one-eyed household god named TeeVee" than he does in the study of the Word. And even the studying that he does of the Bible is generally accompanied by study helps that were written by men who either had no knowledge of independent Baptist views, nor else knew of them, but had no sympathy for them.

Since preparing the original draft of this chapter a number of years ago, the writer has been encouraged to find similar thoughts about this need for a printing ministry stirring the minds of other pastors. Some churches have endeavored to put such a plan into action, but they too often found that most other independent Baptists would not stand with them in the endeavor, so that often the endeavor has come to naught for lack of support. Sadly there has been little real effort put forth. And worse still, many independent Baptists will not purchase the material that is put in print by independent Baptists, preferring rather to use the less sound material published by others.

Some years ago in a discussion of this sad fact, an independent Baptist missionary that had done considerable writing declared that most independent Baptist pastors, because of envy, would not purchase the materials of a fellow independent Baptist, nor would they encourage their churches to purchase it. This writer was offended at this statement at the time, thinking better of his brethren, but subsequently he has found by experience that it is too often true. It is time for independent Baptists to put aside petty jealousies and competitions with one another, and to be concerned for the glory of the Lord at whose ever hand it may come.

We do not wish to whitewash independent Baptists, for they are the nearest thing to apostolic Christians that exist today. Still they come woefully short of the responsibility and the ideal that is set before them. To thrive, we must be obedient to the Lord in all things, for He alone can prosper our feeble efforts. But this will involve a great deal of self-denial and sacrifice. Are we willing to deny self, take up our cross daily and follow Jesus? Only thereby are we true disciples (Matthew 16:24).



The Unequal Marriage

Passages in The Life of a Country Pastor
From *The Baptist Magazine*, 1858

There are few practical questions which perplex me more than whether a professed Christian may marry one who does not give evidence of conversion. Of course extreme cases may be decided without difficulty or hesitation. The believer who should take a partner of openly irreligious or immoral character would violate both Scripture and the instincts of the religious life. But these extreme cases seldom arise, and the question is more frequently raised in a modified form.

The cases which have commonly come before me and in which I have felt difficulty, have been where a member of the church has had her affections engaged by a young man of unexceptionable moral character, and who, during the period of courtship at least, has paid respect to the outward observances of religion.

Those who take the strict and rigid view of the matter urge the express prohibition of Scripture; as, for instance, the passages in the first and second Epistles to the Corinthians. But this appeal has not struck me as quite decisive, for several reasons; the following among others. The state of society and the relationship between the Church and the world are very different now to those which existed in the Apostle's days. By "unbelievers" are meant not nominal Christians, but Jews or heathen. The language would still apply in all its force to converts from Hindooism or Mohammedanism, and to cases where one of the parties is utterly ungodly or immoral.

But I cannot see that the law quite applies with the exactly same stringency and universality in the instances I now speak of. Besides which, the passage generally insisted upon—"Be not unequally yoked"—has no special reference to marriage, but refers to partnership in business with as much force as to the conjugal relation. Marriage is, of course, included, but other relationships are not excluded, and it often happens that those who insist upon the observance of this law in one direction are living in violation of it in another.

I am quite aware that the inconsistency of one man is no excuse for the disobedience of another. I only wish to show that if the law is to apply strictly and rigidly to our state of society, it extends much more widely than is commonly supposed. Again, I feel that there is some force in what a quaint old deacon once said to me, "Why, Sir, if we are to carry that out, we must either have six out of seven members of the Church die old maids, or else, as the prophet says, 'seven women must take hold of the skirts of one man that is a Jew.'" The old man's view was not decisive of the question, yet they were not altogether without force. I am, however, bound to confess that for one marriage of the sort which turns out well, I have known a score the reverse.

My own observation has been decidedly unfavourable to the formation of such unions; and, without going the length of saying that they are in all cases sinful, I am sure that, as a rule, they are most undesirable. One instance may serve to illustrate this. I select it not because it contains anything remarkable, but for the very opposite reason; it is a history so commonplace and so often repeated, that it will be more universally applicable than one of a more romantic kind.

Jane Shafton was left a portionless orphan at an early age, with no near relative but an old aunt, Miss Priscilla Upshaw, who possessed a moderate competency arising from an annuity which ceased with her life. Jane was a fine, high-spirited girl, full of frolic, and with talents of no common order. Her aunt was a good and pious woman, but very prim, precise, and narrow. She tried to do her duty to the poor friendless orphan thus thrown upon her; but having lived alone for nearly twenty years, with no companions save a parrot and a cat, and reading little or nothing save the writings of Mrs. Rowe, Dr. Johnson, and Mrs. Hannah More, it may be easily conjectured that she was not the fittest person in the world to take charge of a young girl.

Her theory of education was to check any outburst of natural vivacity, and to make her charge as prim and precise as herself. The poor child used to stand for two or three hours a day in a constrained posture, in a back-board and stocks, (instruments of torture used in my young days, to turn the toes out and the shoulder-blades in) till ease and freedom of movement were almost destroyed, in order to produce that artificial deformity called beauty. Back-board and stocks were applied to the mind as rigorously as to the body. But all was vain; mind and body both had too much spring and elasticity to be permanently twisted out of shape, and Jane Shafton grew up a charming young woman. She was quite sufficiently conscious of her own merits, and her proud spirit could ill bear the constant reproofs which her aunt felt it her duty to administer. It was, therefore, a mutual relief when both parties agreed that she was old enough to take a situation.

It was soon after this that I first knew her. Some kind-hearted but purse-proud people in my congregation engaged her as governess for their children. They treated her kindly on the whole, but could not at all understand her sensitive feelings. They paid her well for her services, and she was their servant. That, in their view, was the whole of the relationship between them.

Sometimes they made her a present to mark their approval of her conduct; but it was done in so patronising a manner that she was wounded rather than cheered by it. Her proud spirit chafed at being thus made to feel her dependent position. At the same time the sense of her utter orphanage and loneliness was forced upon her. She saw the children clinging to their parents and to one another in mutual affection, whilst she must stand and look on from outside the charmed circle. No family enrolled her among its members, no heart throbbed with love for her, to no arms could she fly for refuge, upon no breast could she weep out her troubles. Her passionate yearning for affection and sympathy sometimes amounted almost to agony.

Many a night did she sob herself to sleep as she thought of her utter loneliness and solitude. She told me that she has sometimes stretched out her arms into the darkness, and convulsively called on her never-forgotten mother to come and comfort her. In this utter darkness of the soul she began to turn towards the Saviour; for as yet she knew him not. Her aunt's teaching seemed so dry and cold that it had failed to attract her. But she remembered a deathbed, where a dying mother had told her of the sympathy of Jesus, and had solemnly besought her to take him as her friend. To these words she had hitherto attached little meaning, but now they spoke to her heart with strange power, and as she pondered them night after night her mother's voice seemed again to be heard, and when she fell asleep, revolving them in her mind, that beloved form would often seem to smile upon her in her dreams.

I noticed an alteration in her manner about this time, and was much struck with the intense and eager attention with which she began to listen, especially when I spoke of the sympathy of Christ. In an interview with her soon afterwards, I joyfully heard from her a narrative of the steps by which she had been led to Jesus, and after a brief interval she was "buried with him in baptism." From this time the change in her whole spirit and deportment was most marked. The proud, haughty reserve in which she had hitherto entrenched herself was broken down. Fits of deep depression or of sullen silence no longer annoyed and perplexed the family with which she lived, Her character, softened, refined, and elevated by religion, endeared her to them. They had always esteemed, and now began to love her. She, too, on her part discovered excellencies in them she had never dreamed of before, and what had previously been merely a situation now became a home.

Soon after this, the son of some members of the church returned from abroad. He was a fine, handsome young fellow; had been carefree, and had caused his parents much anxiety, but for some time had been more serious, and gave promise of settling down into a steady and respectable man. He met Miss Shafton at my house one evening. He was much struck with her, and in a few days it began to be whispered about that he was paying her marked election. His parents encouraged the suit; for though their son would have a good fortune, whilst the poor orphan was penniless, they felt that she would probably be the means of confirming his good resolutions, and leading him to the Saviour.

She was admirably suited for him. How far it would be for her happiness I was not so sure, but stood almost alone in having any doubt about it. Her aunt, and the family with whom she lived, were delighted at the prospect. She, however, gave him little encouragement, and when he made her a formal offer, she replied that she could not accept it at once, and begged a week before she gave him her answer.

He was passionately in love with her, and could not endure the suspense. But she was firm, and he had no alternative but to submit. She came to consult me, and I have rarely been placed in a position of greater difficulty. If I advised her to refuse him, I made myself responsible for inducing a homeless, friendless, portionless orphan to forego a devoted husband, and a most advantageous settlement in life. The hesitation she had already displayed had greatly annoyed her aunt and the family with whom she lived. If she declined his offer, it would be impossible for her to remain in her present situation, such was the intimacy between the families, and her aunt would be so incensed as to refuse her a home. She would thus deprive herself at one blow of the only friends she had in the world. In case her health should fail, what could she do under the circumstances? Then, too, the prospects of her suitor and the hopes of his parents seemed to hang trembling on her decision. If it should be adverse, would he not be consigned to irretrievable ruin? This, at least, was the feeling of his friends, who dreaded the result of a disappointment upon him.

How was I to advise in such a case? It is easy enough to say that if the thing is wrong in principle it ought to be opposed in all cases. Perhaps it was the weakness of my faith which prevented my saying this. Perhaps I ought to have remembered that "wrong never comes right"—that, whilst obeying God she was not friendless or portionless. And that a simple, unquestioning, unhesitating obedience to his commands would certainly prove in the end the wisest course. I am not sure whether I did not show a want of fidelity and courage in my interview with her. I fear I was in fault. But when I found that her affections were deeply engaged to him, I could not force myself to urge her to a refusal, and though I did not advise her to an acceptance of the offer, yet my bias in its favour was pretty evident.

I contented myself with beseeching her to be watchful of her own heart, to beware of declension in the divine life, and to make the conversion of her husband her great aim. As there were no reasons for delay, the marriage speedily took place, and Jane Shafton became Mrs. Henry Gerard.

For the first two or three months after marriage all went on as usual. They attended the services together, as they had been accustomed to do during their brief courtship, and no cloud cast its shadow over their happiness. She had been so unused to affection—the luxury of loving and being loved was so new to her, that she complained of being too happy. She cherished the hope, too, that her husband was seeking Christ. But his attendance at the week-night meetings grew less regular, and then ceased altogether. Soon after this he grew less observant of the Lord's Day.

Indisposition, or fatigue, or the state of the weather, often prevented his attendance at more than one of the services; and business, which I suspected to be arranged for the purpose, frequently occasioned his absence from home on the Sabbath. It became only too evident that the interest in religion, which love to his wife had caused him to feel or to affect, was rapidly passing away, and that its very forms were growing irksome to him. Though she never spoke of this to any one, she deeply felt it. A look of sadness crept over her, and as, time after time, she came to chapel alone, it was easy to see that she had been weeping.

It is inevitable that a process of assimilation should go on, for better or worse, between the husband and the wife. The nobler nature of the two either elevates the baser, or is dragged down by it. The doctrine of the mesmerists, that a balance of the vital forces is established between those who are placed en rapport with one another, is, to a certain extent, true in spiritual affairs. So the young wife, having failed to lift up her husband to her own level, began to sink towards his. Her attendance became less regular, her interest less deep. Having convinced myself that this was not merely fancy on my part, I spoke with her.

In reply, she urged the increasing claims of home on her attention, and pleaded the impossibility of fulfilling her duties as wife and mistress if she were constantly engaged in religious services. I continued the conversation a little longer, and at last she burst into tears, and confessed that her husband could not bear her leaving him in the evening to take part in any religious engagement, and that in order to remove his dissatisfaction she had promised to be less frequently absent from him. I afterwards found that he had taunted her with her fondness for spending her evenings from home, had charged her with neglecting him and her household duties, and had imputed the blame to religion. Was she right or wrong in yielding to his wishes, and in endeavouring to remove the stumbling-block out of his way? I hardly know. It is one of those insoluble difficulties—one of those painful compromises which are inevitable to those who are "unequally yoked."

The habit of regular attendance on the means of grace having been broken through, she became less and less constant. From being present at only one service in the week, she gradually came to attend neither. Some trifling hindrance, which might easily have been brushed aside, was allowed to intervene, and at last the weekly services were altogether forgotten. Of course, a corresponding declension of the divine life was the result. When the whole week is spent in forgetfulness of God, the Sabbath must lose much of its power to bless, My words of affectionate warning and reproof began to be taken in a less kindly spirit, and at last they were so resented that I judged it better to discontinue them.

About a year and a half after marriage she became a mother. I had great hopes that this event might recall her to her "first love." It seemed for a while to have this result, but the influence of her husband counteracted it, and after a time she relapsed into her former state of declension. Soon another child was born; and I wrote her an earnest, affectionate letter, pointing out the sad and dangerous course upon which she had entered. I warned her of the inevitable result of this career of apostasy in heart, and implored her, for the sake of her children, to remember from whence she had fallen, and to repent, and do her first works. To this letter I received no answer, but the next time we met her eyes filled with tears, and she was unable to speak, and turned away. For some months I watched, with intense anxiety the struggle which was evidently going on within, but little thought of the mode in which it was to be brought to an issue.

One cold, cheerless November morning I received a message, requesting me to go to Mrs. Gerard's as soon after breakfast as I could. Of course I did not lose a moment. On reaching the house I was startled to see the blinds down, and learned from the servant who admitted me that the eldest child had died of croup in the night, and that baby was so ill that it could scarcely live through the day. "Missis is in an awful way," added the girl, "We are afraid she'll go out of her mind. She says it's God's curse upon her."

After waiting a short time, the physician in attendance came to me, and said that he had just succeeded in drawing the poor mother from the room in which the youngest child lay at the point of death. He thought that a few words of prayer might tend to soothe and tranquillize her, and thus prepare her to receive the second blow, which, he said, must fall in the course of an hour or two. I at once went to her. The storm of grief had for the time exhausted itself. She refused at first, however, to kneel in prayer, saying that prayer was not for her, but a life of hopeless remorse and despair. At length she yielded, and I prayed with intense earnestness that God, the all-merciful Father, would have pity upon her. She rose from her knees, calmed and strengthened to bear what still awaited her. Oh, blessed consolation to the sore and troubled heart! What solace prayer can give! Without it we were "of all men most miserable."

Though warned of the dangerous condition of her youngest child, she had not admitted the possibility of it, too, being taken from her, till it lay at the very last gasp. Her grief then became frightful. As the conviction that her husband was not worthy of her love had been slowly forcing itself upon her mind, her whole being had seemed to concentrate itself in her two babes. I had sometimes trembled for her, as I noticed her idolatrous attachment to them. And within twelve hours both were taken from her!

What wonder, that for some days, reason tottered upon its throne, and that she trembled upon the verge of insanity. Her husband, who was from home at the time, hastened to return, and I only do, him justice in saying that he did all in his power to mitigate her grief, and lavished upon her the most affectionate attention. But this terrible trial rendered the gulf between them the more obvious. He felt the blow very painfully, for he was an affectionate father; but, as a voice from God, he could not understand it. With his purely human feelings no divine element blended. With her, however, the case was altogether different.

She regarded it as a direct judgment of God upon her. She felt that she had sinned, first, in marrying an unconverted person, and secondly, in neglecting religion in conformity with his wishes. It was this which made the cup so bitter, and yet he not only could not assuage its bitterness, but she could not even tell him of its existence. I draw a veil over my interviews with her. They were most painful, for nothing could shake her conviction that the death of her children was the immediate punishment of her sins. Failing to "pluck from her heart this rooted sorrow," I endeavoured somewhat more successfully to turn her affliction to some useful purpose. By slow degrees she found peace in believing. Humbled by experience of her

own feebleness, chastened by sorrow, and drawn nearer to heaven by the belief that her two little ones were awaiting her there, she became one of the most eminent Christians it has ever been my privilege to know.

Her earthly trials, however, were not yet at an end. Her husband's distaste for religion grew only more and more confirmed. And as his gentle, loving wife, so ready to yield in everything else, was now firm and uncompromising where Christian principle was involved, his home grew wearisome to him, and he began to seek his pleasures elsewhere. Not that he was ever unkind to her, but the gulf between them widened as their habits of feeling and of life receded farther and farther from one another. In a few years three more children were born to them. It was very touching to see the wistful tenderness with which she watched over them, and to hear her speak to them of their brother and sister in heaven, which she did so constantly and familiarly, that they were still regarded as members of the family for a little while absent from the rest. I never felt the full force of Wordsworth's exquisite ballad, "We are Seven," till in reply to an inquiry as to how many children she had living, I once heard her answer, "Five—three on earth, two in heaven."

For some time we had noticed a growing spirituality and heavenliness of temper about her; an indefinable something which occasionally precedes the death of a Christian, as though the feelings of heaven were already anticipated on earth. It was thus with her: there was a sweetness, a tranquil happiness, a deep and perfect peace about her which forced itself on the notice of the most unobservant.

It therefore excited no surprise when the physician, whom I had met there on that mournful morning, said to me one day, that he had been called in to see Mrs. Gerard, and that he thought she would sink fast. So it proved. I had very shortly afterwards to stand by her dying bed. Across her peaceful countenance there would now and then pass an expression of pain almost amounting to agony. Her husband was rocking to and fro at the foot of the bed, convulsed with grief; the eldest girl, just old enough to understand the loss she was about to undergo, was sobbing as if her heart would break; the two younger ones were looking on with silent wonder at the scene. I had just offered prayer on her behalf, when she seemed suddenly endowed with supernatural strength.

For slightly raising her head from the pillow, she beckoned her husband to her, and said with a firm, clear voice, though every word was tremulous with emotion, "Henry, love, we are about to part. Only one thought embitters my joy in the hope of speedily meeting our two dear ones in heaven. Perhaps our parting is a final and eternal one. Perhaps, too, you will fail to train up our children to follow me to immortal life. Promise me, before I die, that my Bible shall always lie on your dressing-table, and that every morning you will read a few verses, Promise me, too, that you will try to pray for help to seek salvation. And for these dear children, remember my dying prayer to you is that you will only entrust them into the hands of those who will make their salvation the first and principal thing."

That these promises were given with intense feeling I need not say. I wish I could add that they sufficed to dissipate the painful expression which still lingered upon her face. It was hard to leave an unconverted husband and three young children behind. She had prayed for them often and long, in hope, yet without confidence, of their salvation. She must now depart. And so she fell asleep in Jesus, her last words being prayer on their behalf.

Since then, several years have passed. Already some of her supplications have borne fruit. The two elder children have grown up in the fear of the Lord, and are now members of the Church. The youngest is a lovely girl of great promise. The husband, still a widower, cherishes most fondly the memory of his departed wife; mourns his own want of appreciation of her whilst she lived; and though I cannot speak of him as a converted man, I believe I shall do so before he dies. May her repeated prayers on his behalf find a speedy answer!

In this "ow'er true tale" I have so altered the names and circumstances to prevent the recognition of the individuals; but I believe that I have accurately and truthfully delineated the experience of one who was "unequally yoked."



The Mercy of God

From *The Pulpit Cyclopaedia*, 1851

"Unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy."—Psalm 62:12

One of the most interesting characteristics of the Deity to fallen man is that of mercy. Angels may have noon-tide blessedness from the exercise of the divine goodness. But sinful dust and ashes overwhelmed with the misery of their state require the interposition of mercy.

Mercy in a certain sense may be considered a modification of the divine goodness, having for its objects, the guilty and the miserable. It differs from pity, as that may be called, forth by the wretchedness of those who have had no share in procuring their adversities. But mercy regards its objects as miserable through their own personal guilt, and voluntary transgression. How delightful that the great and august Being we have been contemplating as holy, and just, and true, that unto him in an especial and infinite degree belongeth mercy! We might argue the divine mercifulness, from the benevolence of God, from the impress on the human conscience as to its excellency, and from the bounty which he is continually bestowing on the ungodly. But let us look at it as it is resplendently exhibited in the volume of eternal truth. Notice,

I. THE DECLARATIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS OF THE DIVINE MERCY WITH WHICH THE HOLY SCRIPTURES ABOUND.

He is the "Lord God merciful;" "Keeping mercy for thousands." His mercifulness is said to reach the heavens. He is "of great mercy;" "The Father of mercies;" "The God of all mercy." He is represented as "rich in mercy;" that he "delighteth in mercy." We read of "his tender mercy;" "the multitude of his mercies." His mercies are said to be "over all his works," "and his mercy is from everlasting to everlasting." And it is reiterated in his Word, that his "mercy endureth for ever."

II. NOTICE SOME OF THE EXERCISES OF THE DIVINE MERCY.

It triumphed in the day of man's apostasy and ruin. It was exercised towards the most notorious sinners both in the Old and New Testament times. Manasseh, Nebuchadnezzar, the woman who was a sinner, the dying thief, Saul of Tarsus to the inhabitants of Nineveh, and to the sinners at Jerusalem. These are but a few out of the many instances of the exercise of the divine mercy. Observe,

III. THE EMBODYMENT OF THE DIVINE MERCY IN THE PERSON OF THE REDEEMER.

He is emphatically "the mercy promised to the fathers." His mission was one of pure mercy. His incarnation was the advent of mercy. His offices were all identified with the intentions of mercy. His doctrines were doctrines of mercy. His invitations, yea, and even his warnings, were the rich displays of his mercy. His work in all its variety of duties was one great work of mercy. His miracles were miracles of mercy. His sufferings and death were for the opening of a wide and deep channel of mercy. His resurrection, and ascension, and pleading in heaven, are all essential to the communication of the divine mercy.

IV. THE PUBLICATION OF MERCY IN THE GLAD TIDINGS OF THE GOSPEL.

The gospel is the grand amnesty between God and a rebellious world; the revelation of his mercy in and through Jesus Christ. How merciful its provision—how merciful its addresses—how merciful its conditions—how free and universal is the mercy offered in the gospel! How vast the blessings of mercy which it publisheth! Mercy for giving, — healing, — renewing, — sanctifying,—comforting,—preserving, —sustaining,—upholding,—restraining,—and finally bestowing the crown of eternal life. Salvation in its origin, progress, and consummation, is entirely of the divine mercy.

REMARKS

1. The mercy of God is exercised in strict harmony with justice and holiness. It has been pertinently said, that justice seeks a fit object, mercy a fit occasion.

Justice looks to what is deserved; mercy to what is needed. Justice is never exercised unmercifully, nor mercy unjustly. God is infinitely just in punishing the incorrigible, and infinitely merciful in pardoning the penitent sinner. There is no clashing of interests in the exercise of the attributes of Deity.

2. We observe all men are the objects of the divine mercy. Equally needing it, and to whom it is equally announced. In a state of nature, guilt is the condition of every man, from the most moral to the most debased, and all must therefore have recourse to the fountain which mercy has opened for sin and uncleanness. As it is with sinners, so it is with saints. None are too holy to dispense with mercy. It must be by the exercise of divine mercy that their salvation must be carried on from the foundation-stone to the completion of the superstructure.

3. Mercy flows to all men through the same channel. God is merciful to no man abstractedly and alone, but to all through the mediation of the better and merciful covenant. In Christ mercy rejoiceth against judgment. In him "mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace kissed each other."

4. The mercy of God is ever associated with believing penitence and prayer; a penitence which is the forsaking of all sin, and the lowly returning of the soul to God. "Let the wicked forsake his ways," &c. "Whosoever confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall find mercy." How appropriate then the prayer of the psalmist, "Have mercy upon me, O God." And of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

5. The divine mercy towards us must be the model of our mercy towards our fellowmen; see Matt. 6: 14, also 18:28, &c.

6. The divine mercy will be celebrated in the anthems of the redeemed forever and ever.



Eelken and Fye

J. Newton Brown

From *Memorials of Baptist Martyrs*, 1854

In the year 1549, about three weeks before Easter, two excellent men of the Baptist body were apprehended in the town of Olde Boor, in West Friesland. Their names were Eelken and Fye. They were brought before the magistrates, and there boldly confessed their faith.

They first asked Eelken, "Who has given you permission to collect the people together to instruct them?"

ANSWER —God has permitted me.

QUESTION —What have you taught?

ANSWER—Ask those who heard it, what was taught among us; for you have apprehended a woman who heard it.

They then asked the woman what she had heard from Eelken.

ANSWER—He read the four Evangelists, Paul, Peter, John's epistles, and the works [Acts] of the Apostles.

Eelken was then again examined.

QUESTION—What do you hold concerning the Sacrament?

ANSWER—I know nothing of your baked God.

QUESTION—Friend, consider what you say; for these words will cost you your life. What do you hold concerning the Mother of God?

ANSWER—Much.

QUESTION—What say you, did not the Son of God receive flesh and blood from Mary?

ANSWER—No. I hold that which the Son of God himself testifies thereof.

QUESTION—What is your judgment of our holy church of Rome?

ANSWER—I know nothing of your holy church, and I acknowledge it not. In the whole of my life, I have never been in a holy church.

"You speak very bitterly; I am concerned for you," said a gentleman of the council, "and fear your life will be forfeited.

QUESTION—Have you not been baptized?

ANSWER—I have not been baptized; but I earnestly desire to be.

QUESTION—What do you think of those false teachers who go about, and baptize people?

ANSWER—Of false teachers I do not approve, but I have greatly longed to hear a teacher sent of God.

They said, "We have, however, heard that you were to be a teacher."

Eelken asked, "Who has made me a teacher?" and they told him they did not know.

Eelken said, "Do you ask me, since you know it not? How then should I know it? I know no one who has made me a teacher, but God has given me all those things for which I have prayed to him."

They said, "We have now written down all the articles that we have at this time demanded of you. If there be anything therein for which you are sorry, we will readily take it out."

The question in reply to the nobleman was, "Do you think, then, that I would deny God?"

Eelken and his companion, Fye, both received sentence; and as soon as they were brought together they embraced, yea, kissed each other's hands and feet with great affection, so that all were astonished who saw and heard it.

The capuchin friars and servants ran and said to the magistrates, "Never did persons love each other like these."

Eelken spoke to Fye, saying, "Dear brother, do not reproach me for having been the occasion of your being brought into suffering."

Fye answered, "Dear brother, do not think that, for it is the power of God."

After the sentence was pronounced, they were kept till the third day. Eelken was executed first by the sword. While the sentence upon Fye was being read, he heard nothing of it by reason of his great joy; and not knowing what was done, or about to be done with Eelken, he sang and leaped, praising and thanking God, and said, "This is the only way."

They now led Fye to the ship in which Eelken lay beheaded, and the wheel on which he should be laid, and also the stake at which Fye was to stand to be burned. In the ship his hands were unbound. But though he sat still, the monks said, "Bind him again."

The executioner said, "Do you bind him?" But the constable of the castle ordered him to bind Fye again.

A woman who saw it greatly wept, but Fye said, "Weep not for me, but for your sins."

Turning to the executioner, he asked, "What will you do to me?"

The answer was, "That you will see."

"Yes, yes," said Fye, "Do what you please. I have already committed myself to the Lord's hands."

He was now attended by some of his brethren, who had accompanied many of the common people. Fye, seeing some of his acquaintances, called out, "Friends, rejoice with me over such a marriage feast as is provided for me."

As he ascended towards the gallows, some of the brethren spoke to him, and greatly rejoiced with him, saying, "This the narrow way; this is the winepress of the Lord; to this belongs the crown."

But when the constable of the castle heard the shout, he cried out, "Let no one touch them, on forfeiture of life and goods."

The executioner, having forgotten his implements, ran into the town to fetch them.

In the meantime, the constable, with the two monks, had got Fye into the confessional, annoying him with bread and wine, but they could not prevail on him to take any, for he did nothing but sing and speak, praising and thanking God.

Unable to succeed, and the executioner having returned, they said to Fye, "How is it that you are so obstinate, seeing you say you are a member of Christ? Will you not then do such a work of mercy, as to receive this bread and wine as wine and bread for our sake?"

He answered, "For your bread and wine I do not hunger; food is prepared for me in heaven."

Finding they could not overcome his determined spirit, they said, "Go, heretic; go."

The constable said, "I have in my life seen many a heretic, but never a more obstinate one than this."

Fye standing ready to meet death, said to the executioner, "Master, have you completed your work?"

He answered, "Not yet."

Fye said, "Yes, here is the sheep with which you have to do."

The executioner then went to him, and tore open his shirt. Next he took the cap from his head, and filled it with gunpowder.

Fye, standing at the post at which he was to be strangled, exclaimed, "O Lord, receive thy servant!"

Whereupon he was strangled, and then burnt. Thus did he pass to his beloved Lord.

The common people cried out, "That was a pious man! If he was not a Christian, there is not one in the whole world!"



Christ's Last Commission to His Disciples

Isaac Taylor Hinton

From *A History of Baptism*, 1849

It was the practice of John to baptize only those whom he had taught the necessity of repentance and faith in Christ. The historian John has testified with equal clearness, that the same course was pursued by Christ and his disciples. The only remaining evidence to be produced respects the commission which Christ gave to his disciples after his resurrection. This command has been recorded by Matthew and Mark, with a perspicuity equal to its brevity.

"Go ye, therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matt. 28:19, 20)

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:15, 16)

The passage in Matthew contains the direction that the apostolic labors are to extend to all nations, whom they are first to teach—then to baptize, with the form prescribed; and after that to continue to instruct the baptized converts in all the details of Christian doctrine and duty. The observance of this order in every point is doubtless important, or otherwise, on an occasion so solemn as that on which the Son of God was about immediately to return to the right hand of his Father, it would not have been insisted on.

An attempt has been made to obscure the first clause of the commission by rendering it "disciple by baptizing;" but is it possible to disciple an adult (in any sense in which a Christian can regard the term) by baptizing him against or without his consent? And, if baptizing an adult in this manner will not "disciple" him, how can an infant be disciplined by a process that leaves an adult unaffected? But the futility of this attempt is rendered evident by referring to the language of Mark; there is the mission—preaching—believing—salvation—baptism. "He that believeth and is baptized" can language be more explicit? Well Baxter observed:

"As for those that say they are disciplined by baptizing, and not before baptizing, they speak not the sense of the text; not that which is true or rational—else why should one be baptized more than another? This is not like some occasional historical mention of baptism; but it is the very commission of Christ to his apostles for preaching and baptizing, and purposely expresseth their several works in their several places and order. **Their first task is**, by teaching, to make disciples, which are by Mark called believers. **The second work is** to baptize them, whereto is annexed the promise of their salvation. **The third work is** to teach them all other things which are afterwards to be learned in the school of Christ. To contemn this order is to renounce all rules of order; for where can we expect to find it, if not here? I profess my conscience is fully satisfied from this text, that it is one kind of faith, **even saving, that MUST GO BEFORE BAPTISM**; and the profession whereof the minister must expect." (*Disput. of Right to Sacr.* Pp. 91, 149, 150)

No Baptist could have expressed himself more decidedly than Mr. Baxter has done; it is surprising how, with such views, he could still continue the practice of infant sprinkling. Calvin, though not so decided in his expressions, seemed to be troubled with doubts in consequence of the language used in the commission. Can any candid mind feel otherwise, than that the commission of Christ to his disciples is in exact conformity to his own practice, and that of John; with the exception that both the preaching and the administration of baptism were now, though as inseparably united as heretofore, to take a wider range through all nations, instead of being confined to the land of Judea? Who can draw any other conclusion, after the investigation of every passage relating to the subject of baptism to be found in the writings of the four evangelists, than that in them not the least intimation of a direction to baptize or sprinkle infants exists; but that the practice of John, the example of Christ, the practice of his disciples, and the very terms of his great commission, all are utterly opposed to anything but immersion as the mode, and believers as the subjects of Christian baptism?

