

ASSOCIATIONAL SERMON.

The Power of a Consistent Life.

SERMON PREACHED BEFORE THE P. E. ISLAND BAPTIST ASSOCIATION AT CAYEN-DISH, MONDAY, JULY 23RD, 1877.

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"Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the Epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."—2 COR. III. 3.

Concluded.

There are many places and circumstances where words would be impracticable or out of place. Christian conduct is always practicable and always right. By his deportment the Christian may always speak for Christ, and the youngest child instruct without offence, the most talented man. We seldom realize the power of Christian conduct. For example, where the young convert literally forsakes all for Christ—father and mother, friends and home;—it often makes a deeper impression upon the minds of men than the most powerful discourse; and leads those who were formerly careless, to attend to the welfare of their souls. With what power the conduct of that Christian speaks who, when he has publicly sinned against a brother, openly seeks his forgiveness, or when he has hastily or unintentionally wronged another, is not satisfied until he has made restitution. What a lesson for humanity in the conduct that returns good for evil, and, like the good Samaritan, shows kindness to those who hate and despise us.

Christ has shown that the effect that good works are intended to produce is to lead men to glorify our Father in heaven. In addressing the believers to whom he wrote, Peter impresses the same truth, "Having your conversation (or course of life) honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evil-doers they may by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." When those who have opposed the cause of Christ, and slandered and hated his followers, become convinced of their sins, they are more readily led to the Saviour where Christians are living consistently, while on the other hand we fear that the unconverted are often prevented from seeking an interest in Christ by the lives of worldly and inconsistent professors. A minister can do little good where the lives of his members are unpreaching what he is endeavoring to enforce from the pulpit. The judgment only will reveal the influence for good exerted by a godly life. Nor shall we ever know in this life how the cause of Christ is injured by those who profess to be its friends. What aggravated the guilt of David, and brought upon him severer judgments than would otherwise have befallen him was the fact that, by his grievous fall he had given great occasion to the enemy to blaspheme. The great apostle was moved to tears by the walk of professors, who he declares were the enemies of the Cross of Christ.

By living a consistent godly life, every Christian can speak for Christ. Here is a means of usefulness open to the weakest and humblest child of God. You often mourn, it may be, because you are not better fitted for taking an active part in the meetings of the church. But while it is our duty to employ every talent in the service of God, yet, remember that it is not the only place you can speak for Christ. However small your talents and obscure your position, whether in active work or confined to your home, or a helpless invalid, live a life of prayer and faith upon the Son of God, live religion in your family, business and social relations, and rest assured you will speak to the hearts and consciences of men. You may never know in this life how much good you have done, but be certain you have not lived in vain.

We remark in the second place that the life either lessens or increases the power of the spoken Word. We need not stop to speak of instances where the life is openly inconsistent. We all know how worse than useless it is for one who is living such a life to attempt to influence men for good. Even unfounded suspicions may greatly injure the influence of good men, showing us the need of avoiding the very appearance

of evil. The outward conduct, however, may be so consistent that men are not able to point to anything very wrong in the life, while the heart may be wholly unchanged, or so dead and cold in the service of religion as to exert no real power for good. An unconverted man might even become an able and eloquent preacher. The same talents that enable him to succeed in other professions might help him to succeed in this. He could learn to impart truth so as to instruct men. We may be benefited by reading a sermon from a book. But the words uttered by the human voice are not so independent of the moral make-up of the man as words are of the pages of a book. A heart unchanged by the grace of God can have no deep sympathy with the high and holy precepts of religion. As the pure white light is dimmed and colored by passing through colored glass, so also the light of God's Word when transmitted through a sinful and darkened heart will only reach others in the same measure it has been received into the speaker's mind. The stream can rise no higher than its source. However much there may be of simulated fervor, and of natural earnestness, an unconverted man will not be able to convey to others any deeper impression of divine truth than he himself realizes. We are aware that instances may be adduced were men, while living hypocritical and wicked lives, have, seemingly at least, been the instruments of considerable good. But whatever real good may have been done can easily be accounted for from the fact that pious men and women prayed and labored both before, and at the time, in which the ingathering took place, while among those added to the church, we fear, a large number will be found to be spurious. In order to be able to feed the lambs and sheep of his flock, Christ emphatically demands that we shall love him.

The same principles hold true in regard to those who are living far from God. In such a condition the perception of divine truth is dim and feeble. A discourse might please the intellect and fancy while it falls dead upon the heart. Men may be carried away with the eloquence and talents of a preacher; his manner and doctrine may please them while they are not drawn any nearer to God, or inspired to labor any more earnestly for the Master by his discourse.

We all know how hard it is at times to speak with that depth of conviction which the importance of the truth demands. Something has disturbed our devotion, filled our minds with the world, and separated between us and God. In order to speak to the consciences of men our hearts must be right with God. To move men we must be moved ourselves. Our words must not only be true, but they must be true to ourselves. To make men feel the danger of a soul out of Christ we must realize that danger ourselves. To impress them with the love of Christ we must have that love shed abroad in our own hearts. A deep conviction of the importance and reality of religion can only be realized when we are living near to God. It can only be obtained by the aid of His Holy Spirit.

A Christian church, living near to Christ and at work in his cause, will make their influence felt in the world. Among the supernatural gifts bestowed upon the early Christian Church, Paul gives the pre-eminence to prophesying because it was most useful in the Church. We may not be able to understand its real character in every particular, but we learn from the language of the apostle that it was for edification, exhortation and comfort. He shows further that if one should come into their meetings where all prophesy, "He is convinced of all; he is judged of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth."

The days of miraculous gifts, as enjoyed by the Apostolic church, seem to have passed away, but perhaps the nearest approach to a meeting like the one described by the apostle would be in times when the Holy Spirit is poured out—when a church is spiritually right with God. The very air of the room seems full of spiritual influences, and the songs of praise, and words of exhortation and prayer come from hearts warm with the love of Christ.

The cold and backsliding are quickened with new zeal, and those who come to scoff remain to pray. It is churches thus alive in the Master's service that are principally used by God in advancing his cause.

We have no desire to deny or conceal the fact that Baptists consider it their duty to use every legitimate means for the purpose of disseminating their principles. Our views on the subjects and mode of Christian baptism are necessarily aggressive, as they undermine the foundation upon which Pedobaptist churches are built up. While we may mourn that we are placed by our views in a position of antagonism to many whom we esteem as pious and learned, yet we cannot give up what we conscientiously hold. With us it is not a question of much water or little, but what did Christ do and command. If Christ, as the language and circumstances plainly indicate, was immersed in the river of Jordan, and if his immediate followers, in obedience to his command, buried by baptism those who believed on his name, then, although men or an angel from heaven preach anything different from what Christ did and commanded, we can give it no heed. It is not only the substitution of an unmeaning ceremony for one that beautifully typifies the burial and resurrection of Christ and the washing away of sin, but it is an attempt to improve upon what divine wisdom has fixed, and an act of disobedience to the command of Christ.

But even graver charges may be urged against infant baptism than against the substitution of pouring and sprinkling for the ancient method of immersion. History shows that it has opened a way whereby many other errors have found an easy entrance into the Church of Christ. But the most serious one, perhaps, is its tendency to lead its subjects to lean upon its supposed miraculous efficacy and to think that they can grow into religion without a change of heart. In this way it renders them unsusceptible to the appeals of the gospel and imperils the salvation of their souls. For these reasons we must pray and labor as earnestly for the uprooting of these errors as we do for the spread of the gospel.

But then comes the question which we wish especially to bring before you at this time, namely, as to the most successful way of doing this. Those who have studied deeply the history of our denomination tell us that during seasons of widespread religious declension like that which succeeded the Revolution, 1688, in England, Baptist principles have lost ground; while on the other hand, in periods of deep religious interest, when men's consciences were tender, and they went to their Bibles to find out what God said, our views have spread rapidly. We might refer you for example to the time of the Commonwealth in England, when a large part of Cromwell's army were Baptists, and our principles began to take deep root; to the religious movements in the latter part of the last century, and at different times since, especially in America.

May we not learn from this a lesson which we can improve to advantage. True there are times and places where we should be recreant to our duty and false to our principles if we refused to defend them. We must put baptism where Christ and his apostles placed it, and instruct men that it is their duty not only to repent and believe, but to be baptized for themselves. We must perform the ordinance in the way in which we have the best possible evidence that Christ and his followers commanded it to be done. But at the same time let us never lose sight of the fact that our real success depends upon the spirituality of our ministry and membership. What is needed is a deep reverence for the Bible as the only standard of authority. We cannot hope to inspire others with a deep reverence for that Book if our own lives are not regulated by its precepts. We shall have small success in leading others to obey the command of Christ in one respect if we are not obeying it in others. Holding and practicing immersion does not make men Baptists. Baptism must be preceded by repentance and faith. A Baptist church must be a converted church. If the time should ever come that our creed should be absolutely faultless, and our churches spiritually dead, other denominations

will do for the world what ought to be done by Baptists.

Thus we have endeavored to show that a Christian's real power for good lies in living a spiritually consistent life. The only way in which we can make the members of our churches such, is for each one to commence with himself. If we love Christ and his truth we will desire to help on his cause. The first question of gratitude is What can I do for the one who has done so much for me? Love's labor is light. The loving and obedient child thinks it no hardship to labor to render the declining days of a mother, who has loved and cared for him in early life, comfortable and happy. But a mother's love can not begin to compare with the love of Christ. There is no possible obligation so binding as the one that rests upon the redeemed soul to show his gratitude to Christ. He himself has said, "If ye love me keep my commandments." Let us labor and speak for him as God has given us talents and opportunities, but above all, let our lives be such that they will speak for him and enforce what we endeavor to proclaim to others. Let us live so near to them that we shall always feel his love burning in our hearts.

Then shall we best proclaim abroad
The honors of our Saviour God,
When his salvation reigns within
And grace subdues the power of sin.

For the Christian Messenger.

The Christian's Death-bed.

On a bed of pain a sufferer lay,
Slowly sinking day by day;
But he felt his heavenly Friend was near,
And his faith in Him was firm and clear.
And joy shone out from his fading eye
When he saw his hour had come to die;
"I'm going," said he, "to the land of light,
I'm going to Heaven where all is bright.

The river of death is cold and deep,
But, dearest friends, you must not weep;
For soon with Christ I shall abide,
In my sweet home beyond the tide.
I see a beautiful, shining band,
On the river's banks I see them stand,
I'll join them e'er the morning light,
I'm going to Heaven where all is bright.

The evening hour is stealing on,
The charm of the sunny day is gone;
'Tis sweet to think in this fading light,
That in Heaven above there'll be no night.
'Tis a solemn thing for my soul to stand
So near the verge of the sinless land;
This world is fading from my sight,
I'm going to Heaven where all is bright.

As I look back at the faded years,
How vain and sinful my life appears;
My feet have been often prone to stray
Out of the straight and narrow way.
I have no merit of my own,
In the blood of Christ I trust alone;
Soon I shall be with Him clothed in white,
I'm going to Heaven where all is bright.

The dew of death is on my brow,
This world is nothing to me now;
It cannot cheer my failing heart,
But I possess a better part;
What should I do in an hour like this
Had I no hope of future bliss?
The tempter now cannot affright,
I'm going to Heaven where all is bright.

I long for that Celestial place,
That I may see my Saviour's face.
Though many beautiful things are told
Of the gates of pearl, and the streets
Of gold;
It is a sweeter thought to me
That there my Saviour I shall see;
I hope to have that joy to night;
I'm going to Heaven where all is bright.

No pain can enter the world above,
No sin can cloud the joy of love;
I'm going to join the blood-washed throng,
And sing with them their happy song.
I've almost done with this world of strife,
Soon I shall begin the endless life;
I'm passing away from mortal sight,
I'm going to Heaven where all is bright.

Yonder a shining form I see,
I know it is Jesus, coming for me;
I hear him calling my soul away,
And here I can no longer stay.
My cares and sorrows all are o'er
I've almost reached the other shore;
The gates of the city are now in sight,
I'm going to Heaven—Good night—
Good night."

HARRIET COLE.

Milton, Queens.

Miss Mary H. True, principal of the articulating school for deaf mutes in Portland, Maine, has accepted an advantageous offer to go to England to teach her methods for four years. She has previously taught in that country for two years with great success, and was to leave America in August.

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

Our late Convention.

Dear Bro. Selden,—

I desire gratefully to acknowledge the kindness of Providence in permitting me, after a long and serious illness, to enjoy the privilege of meeting again with my beloved brethren in Convention. My pleasure, like that of many others, was enhanced on this occasion by the very acceptable visits of our esteemed Brethren McKenzie, Lorimer, and Timpany.

Being respectfully requested to open the Session by prayer, I sincerely requested that a spirit of mutual brotherly-kindness might constantly pervade all hearts; and that we all might subsequently return to our respective homes with increased Christian affection toward each other. Such I trust in general has been the case. It can not be denied, however, that in a few instances there was not as much caution exercised to avoid wounding the feelings of any as might be desired. It did not seem prudent to attempt imparting any admonition at the time; since such apparent interference might be regarded as personal, or partial. Probably, however, it may now be allowable for future benefit to relate a circumstance which was brought to my recollection on one or two occasions. It was this:—One of my younger brothers expressed his appreciation of hospitality and courtesy. An older brother replied, "I approve of hospitality, but I do not care much about courtesy." The younger brother remarked, "An inspired Apostle bids, 'Be courteous' (1 Pet. iii. 8.) 'Does he?' said the other, 'well, really I had forgotten it.' It is obviously desirable that brethren engaged in debate should be careful not to forget this scripture precept, with which happily accord the principles of genuine politeness.

There is another point on which I may probably be permitted to offer a remark. People sometimes become warm in debate through misunderstanding. An instance came under my notice—I was not one of the parties—in which a widower applied for a marriage license. The issuer, while preparing it, remarked, "This is the fourth." The applicant replied, "No, it is the third." The other answered earnestly, "I know it is the fourth. The answer returned to this, with apparent warmth, was, 'I know better than you do, and I know it is but the third.'" The issuer then explained, "I mean the fourth day of the month." "O yes," says the other, "it is the fourth day of the month; but it is only the third marriage." This explanation brought the contending parties into unity.

This may be applied to a portion of the debate on the question relative to the Home Mission, in which I took no part. It appeared evident to me that if the subject had been courteously and thoroughly discussed it must have become apparent to all that neither party intended to misrepresent; but that the great difference between the sums stated to have been raised by the former Missionary Boards and those of the Union was largely owing to the different manners of keeping the accounts; as the former were accustomed to report only the amounts gratuitously given by churches, societies, and individuals, while the latter included also the sums collected on the missionary fields occupied. I sincerely rejoice in the benefits resulting from the efforts put forth by the Mission Union; and it is my earnest desire that any subsequent charges which may be made, may prove advantageous. I am apprehensive, however, that some of our younger brethren are not fully aware of the amount of good effected through the Divine blessing by the labors of the former Boards. Not to mention the happy changes wrought by these means in many parts of this Province, especially the Eastern parts, the precious fruits produced on the Islands of Cape Breton and Prince Edward are obvious. To the former the venerable Joseph Dimock was sent in 1814, at the commencement of our organized Home Mission work. His visits were repeated, and other zealous and successful men followed in this "work of faith and labor of love." In the year 1825 the writer went to Prince Edward Island, also in the service of the