

Sunday Reading.

How far is it called to the Grave.

"How far is it called to the grave?"
The boy looked up from his play,
"The grave? I have not heard of the grave; it must be far away."

"Often the sailors have told me,
Of lands where the palm-trees wave,
Of lands of beauty and wonder; but they never spoke of the grave."

"Naught he knew of the silent grave,
Naught knew but his play and prayer;
Yet his life's travel was nearly o'er, his little feet just there."

"How far is it called to the grave?"
The lover looked up with a smile,
"Ah! from the golden land of love it must be many a mile!"

"Our road lies yet in the sunshine,
Through song, and through scented May,
Far, far off, is the silent grave, and its shadows cold and gray!"

He could not see that his darling,
With the bride-flowers in her hair,
And the wedding token on her hand, was almost, almost there.

"How far is it called to the grave?"
The mother turned with a tear;
White grew the roses in her cheek, her heart stood still with fear.

"How far? 'Tis close to the hearth-stone;
Alas! for the baby feet—
The little bare feet that all unaid, haste there with steps so fleet!"

"And alas for the aged footsteps,
And those that have gone astray!
And alas for the broken-hearted! they find it far away."

"Yet longest journeys have their end,
And the darkest shadows flee,
And even the dreariest rivers find their way unto the sea."

"How far is it called to the grave?"
"It is only a life, dear friend;
And the longest life is short at last when Heaven is at the end!"
—Christian Advocate.

For the Christian Messenger.

Is it always right to obey the dictates of conscience?

A résumé of an article in the closing number for 1881, of the *Baptist Review*, by Dr. J. M. Pendleton.

As I read the paper and reread it, I felt impressed with its importance, and wished that its truths might be brought home to every member of our Baptist Churches.

Dr. Pendleton begins his article by giving a definition of *Conscience*. He rejects the definition of Webster, Wayland and Dick, and accepts that of Dr. J. L. Dagg, in his "Elements of Moral Science," who says, "That peculiarity in the constitution of our minds, by which they are qualified to exercise moral approbation or disapprobation, and to feel moral obligation, is called the moral faculty, or conscience."

Man possesses both understanding and judgment, as well as conscience. The judgment is dependent on the understanding, and conscience upon the judgment. The judgment supplied with facts and light by the understanding decides that a thing is right or wrong, and conscience approves or disapproves accordingly. To make conscience perceive, discern and decide, is to make it intrude into the domain of judgment. The decisions of judgment may be right or they may be wrong—but whether right or wrong when once it gives its decision that an act is right, though it may be really wrong, conscience utters its voice of approval. Conscience therefore is no more infallible than the judgment. When the judgment errs the conscience endorses its error.

Dr. P. illustrates by infanticide in the East, by Saul of Tarsus—who was thoroughly conscientious in persecuting the early Christians. The history of Saul of Tarsus gives a negative answer to the question, Is it always right to obey conscience? It is not always right. After his conviction his conscience condemned that which it before approved. Before his conversion he was a conscientious sinner, after it he became a conscientious saint. He honestly believed he was right when he was wrong,—and honestly believed he was right when he was right.

The question is often asked. Can it

be right to act in opposition to the dictates of conscience? The answer is "No," for it cannot be right for a man to do what he believes to be wrong. And just here arises a fallacy which is very prevalent, and especially in the religious world. "If it cannot be right to do what is believed to be wrong, the conclusion hastily reached is that it cannot be wrong to do what is believed to be right." Sincerity in pursuing a certain course, or in accepting certain doctrines as a ground of faith and practice, does not make either right. Belief in the authority of Tradition does not make it right to act according to the teachings of Tradition. There are many impenitent sinners who believe that they are in no great danger of losing their souls, and the more sincere they are in this belief the more certain will be their neglect of salvation. Sincerity therefore is injurious in proportion to its intensity.

But that sincerity is not to be our guide is evident, because it nullifies the Bible. A dozen men may hold as many different opinions on a given point, they cannot all be right. In fact all may be at variance with the Bible, and yet according to the doctrine under consideration, they are all right. The Word of God is the only standard of appeal both as to our faith and practice and any thing that opposes it—must be rejected.

There are thousands among Pedobaptists who, no doubt, sincerely believe that it is right to sprinkle infants, and call it baptism. They sincerely believe that sprinkling or pouring is the baptismal act, because the blood of Christ is said to be sprinkled and the Holy Spirit is said to be poured out. But does their belief that it is right to baptize an infant make it right? Certainly not. Here some may ask, "Does a belief that immersion is right make it right? The answer is the same. Certainly not. If it is not enjoined in the Word of God, though it be universally acquiesced in, that would not make it right. The Bible is the supreme standard of right. Whatever accords with its teachings is right, and no belief of men however sincere they may be in that belief, can make it right, and vice versa. Whatever conflicts with its teachings, is wrong no matter how energetically and conscientiously it may be expressed. There is no process by which error can be transmuted into truth.

Another question is asked, "If it is always wrong to act in opposition to the dictates of conscience, how can it ever be wrong to act in accordance with its dictates?" Hence the criminality of the action arises from previous failure to enlighten the conscience more than from any other cause. To illustrate a drunken man is more blameworthy for drinking, than for being drunk—and yet the laws of the land do not excuse the acts of a drunken man. They do not regard him as an irresponsible agent, but hold him accountable for his deeds; though some suppose the criminality lies in the drinking only.

Ignorance is of two kinds—voluntary and therefore criminal—involuntary and therefore excusable. Thousands in our country can scarcely be said to have a correct idea of the way of salvation through Christ, and this not because they may not know, but they prefer ignorance to knowledge. They are willingly and perversely ignorant. The Word of God, which is able to make wise unto salvation is within reach but they will not read it. The gospel is faithfully preached, but they will not hear it. The heathen having never heard of Christ, will never be condemned for rejecting Him, however certain and righteous their condemnation may be on other accounts. Ignorance prevailing, the understanding is darkened, and if it is a sin to continue in ignorance, a darkened understanding is sinful. But the judgment is dependent upon the light supplied by the understanding; and if therefore it cannot supply sufficient light the decisions of the judgment will be wrong, or it right it can only be by accident. Another fact is to be taken into account, a depraved heart influences unfavorably the judgment. It has biased the judgment a thousand times. It is on this principle that judges are forbidden in Scripture from receiving gifts. Human governments hold their subjects responsible for the state of their hearts,

if it be shown by word or deed. And so in suits for slander and in trials for murder, there is always special effort to prove malice. The object is to show the state of the heart. On this the whole matter turns. And God looks at the heart. He knows its disposition; he understands its purposes and feelings whether shown in words and actions or not, the first great commandment is 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.' Man therefore should love God, he sins in not loving Him, and this is due to the disposition of his heart. 'So that if a man is not responsible for the state of his heart, he is not responsible for his motives—since the moral quality of all acts is determined by the motives which prompt them—and if not responsible for his motives he is not responsible for his words and deeds, resulting therefrom and so responsible for nothing. Thus he is under no obligation to God, a conclusion few will care to admit.

Nor, is this all. Sin has a hardening effect and sinful habits grow daily. If therefore a man has no disposition to love God and is not responsible for it, it must follow that the less he is inclined to love and serve God the farther he is removed from responsibility, which is simply absurd.

Man therefore is responsible for the state of his heart, and since the disposition of the heart influences the judgment, the decision of which he is responsible; and if his judgment controls his conscience, he is under obligation to have such a conscience as approves whatever is right, and condemns whatever is wrong, the Word of God being the standard of appeal. It will be seen therefore that persons may follow the dictates of their consciences, and, at the same time sin against God. The reason of this, conscience is not sufficiently enlightened because the judgment has given wrong decisions, and their decisions are to be traced either to imperfect facts furnished by the understanding or to the biasing influence of a depraved heart. When this is the case it is sinful to do what the conscience approves, because it approves what is really wrong, though the judgment has decided that it is right.

To illustrate this the writer refers a second time to Saul of Tarsus. He verily thought within himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. But why? Because he overlooked the prophecies which referred to the Messiah's humiliation, and fixed his attention exclusively on those descriptive of his glory. The disposition of his heart led to this, warping his judgment, and conscience approved the wrong. He reached this conclusion because the disposition of his heart prevented him from making a proper examination of the Old Testament scriptures. And so he sinned in doing what his conscience approved. This he himself acknowledges after his conversion for he deemed himself unworthy "to be called an apostle, because he persecuted the Church of God."

Thus we are able to account for many of the false doctrines and practices which prevail in the religious world.

Some sects deny the divinity and atonement of Jesus. Why? Because these doctrines are not in the Bible? No! but because the Scriptures teaching them are unfairly interpreted. Prejudice, early training and pride of the heart, all unite in rendering it extremely difficult to be faithful in Scripture interpretation.

Some persons entertain very low views of the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, while others deny the necessity of regeneration altogether. Why is this? The natural heart has much to do with it; for if the Holy Spirit in regenerating the heart does a work so radical and marvellous that it is called "a new creation," the heart itself must be fearfully bad. Self-love will not make such an admission if it is possible to avoid it. If a change of heart be denied, it can only be done by assuming that the heart is all right, and this is born of pride. How easy thus to see that the prejudice and pride of the heart control the judgment, and that the judgment controls the conscience. And for this are they not blamable?

There are many who deny the future punishment of the wicked, and why?

They do not believe all that God says. They magnify His benevolence, and make but little of His truth and holiness. God is too good to punish His creatures, but it is forgotten that He is too good to lie, as well. They believe what they wish to believe. The idea originates in this way—a wicked heart corrupts the judgment which again affects the conscience, and so they believe a falsehood, and in this they may be perfectly sincere, and may live and die with a lie in their right hand. But are such blameless? No. They are culpable, even though they sincerely believe a lie.

There are Pedobaptists of various kinds, but all are agreed in the practice of infant baptism. In the composition of their churches, infant membership is not only tolerated, but in most cases is the predominant element. It seldom occurs to them that this arrangement sets aside the fundamental principles of New Testament church organization. And they are sincere in this. Their consciences approve when they have their speechless infants baptized, and would condemn them if the ceremony were omitted. Why are they sincere? Because they go to the Old Testament to ascertain who are proper subjects of a New Testament ordinance. Are they at fault in this? Certainly, because they lay down what may be called *Jewish premises* and then proceed to draw from them *Christian conclusions*. So long as they continue to do this they are wrong, and so long as they are wrong they are to be blamed. Let them take the Word of God and interpret it without partiality or prejudice, and their consciences will as certainly condemn infant baptism as they now approve it.

As to the act of baptism, it is one of the strangest of strange things that there should be any controversy on this point. Olinthus Gregory once remarked, "It is the only subject in the whole range of theology which has all the evidence on one side." It is as easy to prove black is white, as to prove that the act of baptism is sprinkling or pouring, or anything else than immersion. The man who can prove from the New Testament, that sprinkling or pouring is baptism need not step there. By the same process of reasoning he can prove every one of the doctrines of the Gospel to be false, he can show that immortality is a dream, and that heaven and hell are a fiction. He can help Atheism to say with greater confidence, 'there is no God.'

Why do Pedobaptists attempt what is plainly impossible? And how can they be sincere in their attempts? They are unwilling to apply the plain principles of interpretation to the word *baptizo*. They have inherited partialities for their views and practices. Pride of consistency keeps many of them from receiving the truth. Baptists are not among the aristocracy. Influence, social position and political power are not to be found among them as with others. Various influences are at work. Let Pedobaptists take the Word of God as their only guide. Let them no longer reverence 'Confessions of Faith,' 'Prayer Books,' 'Disciplines,' and 'Traditions.' Let them hearken to the voice of God in His holy oracles. Let them open their minds and hearts to the reception of truth. Let them go wherever truth leads them. Let them 'buy the truth and sell it not,' buy it at any price and sell it at no price. Then their conscience enlightened by the infallible Word of God, will approve what is really right, and condemn what is really wrong. But while they continue to pursue their present course, however sincerely they may adhere to their errors—the adherence is not defensible, it is most censurable. 'For it is not always right to obey the dictates of conscience.' The article concludes by a quotation from Dr. Archibald Alexander's Moral Science, which admirably and forcibly sustain the position which Dr. Pendleton has sought to establish—that book ought to be commended to Dr. Murray who is just now writing such lucid and voluminous articles for the enlightenment of the readers of the *Presbyterian Witness*.

I have sought in the above to lay before your readers the gist, and more, the line of argument pursued by the writer. I have done it mostly in the author's own words, and sometimes in my own. I only hope they may lead some who are sincere in error to forsake it—and others who have the truth to cherish it more dearly.

One in Christ.

REV. R. SHINDLER.

Yes; *one in Christ*. All the children of God, all who believe in Jesus, are one in Him. He is the Head, of His body the Church; the Vine, of which all believers are branches: the Foundation, on which the "living stones" of God's "spiritual house" are built. He is the Centre of all life, the Source of all grace, the Spring of all spiritual blessings, the Sun in whose light the redeemed from among men, on earth and in heaven, live and walk and serve. Christ is All, and in all. And of all those who have *Christ in them* it may be safely affirmed that they are one in Him.

This truth is commonly acknowledged among Christians. But is it acted upon? Is it as generally a living fact? Christians are the living representatives of Christ. Are we willing to own as brethren all those whom He has pronounced the children of God?—those who believe on Him, and love one another? A Christian should be a living embodiment of the truth; and he is so as he walks in the truth, and as the truth lives in Him. In this way every body of Christian people should be a visible embodiment of Christ and His truth.

Where there is a spiritual oneness there should be an actual union. Uniformity of ritual and creed may cover the greatest possible divergence of sentiment, and the union be one of name or rank or interest only. Melancholy specimens of this sort of thing are only too apparent, especially in ecclesiastical circles, but also among some Non-conformists. The union which should grow out of oneness in Christ is one in which oneness of heart may exist alongside of difference of opinion and a want of external uniformity. The truth is, the uniting influence of the Spirit of Christ proceeds from the centre outwards to the circumference, and then, making every one thrilled with its life a subsidiary centre, it brings all back to the great Centre—gathering together in one all who are in Him. Much of this spirit exists among some of the free Churches, but there is room for a large increase of it. Noble specimens of it had been witnessed, too, as between individual members of the State and the free churches, but an almost insurmountable barrier exists in the patronage of one sect by the State; some can and do rise above it; but in reference to this Christ-like conduct it may be said of the many, "It is high, they cannot attain unto it."

In some Christian sanctuaries, and also among some who worship in the same sanctuary, there is such a yielding to worldly ideas of rank and class, that the aspect strikes a stranger, and such as have been converted from heathenism, with astonishment, if not with strong disapprobation and disgust. Such was the case, some years ago, at Liverpool, when Rammohun Raj, a converted Brahmin, met a number of representative men of different denominations at the house of the late Dr. Raffles to breakfast. There were about thirty persons present, and the conversation assumed a lively character. The oneness of believers in Christ was one topic of eager discourse. The Brahmin listened attentively, and presently joined in the conversation with a shrewdness which took some by surprise, and not a little staggered others.

"Ah," he said, "you say that you are all one in Christ, all brethren, and equal in Him. Well, go to the cathedral at Calcutta. There you will see a grand chair of crimson velvet and gold, that is for the Governor-General of India. Then there are other chairs of crimson and gold, they are for the members of Council. Then there are seats lined with crimson, they are for the merchants and such like. Then again there are bare benches for the common people, and the poor. And yet you say we are all one in Christ? But if the poor man, whose seat is there on the bare bench, were to sit down in the crimson velvet chair, of the Governor-General, they would break his head! Yet you are all one in Christ!"

Some one was about to expound the matter to him, and explain the impropriety of anyone taking the seat of the representative of the Queen, when a well-known Friend seized the opportunity to inveigh against the unscriptural class distinctions maintained in some places of worship and tolerated in very many more.

If it were desirable it would be impossible to level society up or down to a common measure, and if it could be done it would be useless and would require to be repeated frequently; for twenty-four hours would create a diversity. But while Christianity recognizes the different stations in society of its adherents, it is essentially opposed no less to the Spirit of caste than to the spirit of sectarianism. Its spirit is that of oneness. One in Christ, the ever-living and all-glorious Head, whose words to His disciples are to-day of equal force and authority as when he first said, "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." As we have His Spirit as we look and cleave to Him, as we keep His Cross in our eye, and realize what He has done for us, we shall renounce sectarianism, and unbrotherly conduct, and aim to "walk in the light as He is in the light," and so "have fellowship one with another."

The Logic of Salvation.

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There can be only one infinite, supreme Being; Jehovah alone is infinite and supreme; Therefore, Jehovah is the only one living and true God. God is the source of inspiration; The Holy Bible was written by men inspired of God;

Therefore, the Holy Bible is the word of God.

God has revealed Himself to man; The Scriptures are the revelation; Therefore, the Scriptures are profitable for instruction in righteousness.

Disobedience is sin; Man disobeyed God; Therefore, man is the sinner.

Sin is the transgression of God's holy law;

The law condemns sin; Therefore, the sinner is condemned before God.

God's is saving love; God loves the sinner; Therefore, God loves the sinner to save him.

Jesus Christ is the son of God; God gave His son to die for sinners; Therefore, Jesus Christ is the sinner's substitute.

Without shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins; The blood of Jesus Christ atones for sin;

Therefore, the sinner that believes on Jesus Christ is saved.

There is no forgiveness without repentance; God will forgive the penitent for Christ's sake;

Therefore, the sinner that repents in Christ is forgiven.

Sinners "must be born again;" "Whoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God;"

Therefore, the penitent, believing sinner is a child of God.

The Holy Spirit is God; The Holy Spirit will guide the humble believer;

Therefore, the humble believer is kept by the power of God.

Obedience is the evidence of saving faith; The true believer is always obedient;

Therefore, "by their fruits ye shall know them."

Endurance is the proof of saving faith; The true believer will endure;

Therefore, "them that endure to the end shall be saved."

The atonement of Jesus Christ is sufficient for all;

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;

Therefore, "he that believeth" not shall be damned.

"We shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ;"

"Without holiness shall no man see the Lord;"

Therefore, "these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

We do not work too much, but we do pray too little for the work we do.