

The Pulpit.

THE GRACE OF GIVING.

BY REV. J. H. HARTMAN.

I pity the man who shrinks from that part of the gospel which deals with his purse, for he who has not yielded his purse to the Lord has not given his heart. To be a Christian one must do more than exercise faith or cherish a hope; he must practice benevolence. "Trust in the Lord and do good" is an injunction that has in mind the interests of others as well as one's own. It is the prerogative of every believer to engage in all beneficiary enterprises affecting the temporal and spiritual welfare of man. True religion fits the soul not only for heaven, but for greatest usefulness on earth. The church of Christ is organized for terrestrial as well as celestial good, which she is instructed to engage in systematically, energetically, for the glory of her great Head.

"Now concerning the collection of the saints," says the apostle, "as I have given order for the churches at Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." In this injunction of the apostle to the church at Corinth to contribute of her means to the church at Jerusalem, we have given us the primitive plan for gathering benevolent funds.

Christian benevolence, if we understand the text, while it ministers to its own needs, reaches out also beyond all natural limitations of family, of neighborhood, country or nationality, and is governed by the calls of the common brotherhood of man. In its benevolence Christianity is as broad as the love of Christ, which, breaking down all race distinctions and barriers, all prejudices and caste, is commensurate with the human family; taking in the Jews, the Gentiles, the Barbarian and Greek. For here we have an example of the Gentile Christian of Greece systematically contributing to supply the destitute laborers at Jerusalem. Here at the Corinthian church was thus inaugurated a system of benevolence which was not only to benefit brethren in a distant city, but also the contributors themselves in developing the grace of giving.

We emphasize the thought that the work was systematically done, and followed up as attentively and conscientiously as any other Christian duty. The time for its performance was fixed on the first day of the week; the day commemorating our Lord's resurrection; the day of the church's greatest joy; a day that which none was more fitting for the exercise of grateful charity. It was observed as a part of the Sabbath worship, as a constant discipline in unselfish devotion to others and a reminder of God's greater sacrifice for us in the gift of his Son. The direction is that every one should engage in it. The work could not be done by proxy any more than any other personal duty could be. As one cannot eat for another or have his praying done by another, so cannot one sacrifice for another. Each must eat, pray and give for himself. They were to give as God had prospered them. A sanctified judgment was here allowed liberty, but the use made of this liberty was the measure of the believer's joy and the sense of his obligation to God. The responsibility of the amount to be given was with God, but the proportion was with the believer.

Regarding the duty as obligatory, what shall be the amount—a hundredth, a fiftieth, or a tenth? A tenth is the Lord's due. A tenth let it be. It is the testimony of scores of godly men who through their lives have devoted that portion of their income to benevolence, that they have been more than rewarded for the sacrifice made. A tenth is our due, nine-tenths given leaves a tenth unpaid which we owe to God. Only what we give, in addition to our dues, arises to the dignity of a free-will offering.

The excellence of this system of gathering benevolent funds is seen in its voluntariness and freedom from parade. "Let every one of you lay by him in store." In the privacy of his own home let each calculate, not the proportion, for that God has designated, but the amount, and bring it into the sanctuary as a part of the homage he pays his heavenly Father. "Every man, according as he propoeth in his own heart, so let him give not grudgingly" a due portion of what God has given him. Let him give not spasmodically or under favorable moods only, but systematically, cheerfully and from a principle of unvarying fidelity to Christ.

The text is urged on the broad principle that under the Christian dispensation all we have and are belongs to Christ. That our possessions we hold as stewards and the final title rests not in us, but in Almighty God. He does not ask for a return of the principle each year, but for a portion of our gains,

each week, and promises temporal and spiritual blessings as the reward of its payment.

Come we now to consider some of these rewards. How many godly men have testified to the truth of the words, "It is more blessed to give than receive?" When God arranged the great chain of events he decreed that blessings should follow every act of benevolence. They follow as inevitably as effect follows cause. They may not always be immediate, they may not at first be perceptible. But they are inevitable. If we could always know the harm we unconsciously escape, and the good we receive by systematic giving we should better realize the blessedness of this means of grace.

Is sacrifice not of the essence of our holy religion? Was not its Author a sacrifice. Are we not redeemed by a sacrifice, and must we not ourselves sacrifice to obtain the richer joys of him who gave himself for us? Why should we not give, since Christ himself is a gift, and faith, and the Comforter, and eternal life—all the free gift of God to undeserving beneficiaries? And is a tenth returned to the great Giver not an unmentionable portion for his undivided gift to us? And what part can he have of the spirit of sacrifice who withholds from the rightful owner the portion he claims each week?

Now I think it is safe to say that our interest in religion is always measured by the sacrifices we make to extend the kingdom, and that interest also measures our joy and usefulness as Christians. If we love a cause we will sacrifice for it, if we sacrifice for a cause we will learn to love it. If you have little interest in religion, giving in the name of Christ will increase it. If your interest is great, giving will enlarge it yet more. As it is impossible to sacrifice much for an object without becoming much interested in it, so also is it impossible to be much interested in our Lord without giving to him of the substance of our toil. The principle is applicable to any of the great benevolent institutions of our denomination.

There is also a benefit in the frequency of giving, as directed by the Apostle, "Upon the first day of the week." Bring into the sanctuary every Lord's day what you mean to give to him. There can be no doubt that this was the primitive method of gathering funds for the maintenance of the gospel and must therefore have convincing force with all who recognize the authority of apostolic order and practice. Our church polity, our ordinances, their order, our doctrines, their interpretation, our practices, are professedly primitive and apostolic; why shall not our benevolence be? We give the more earnest heed to whatever has the ring of apostolic order. The more scrupulously we heed that order, the closer we come to the great Head of the church himself. And surely what is the duty of one, is the duty of all.

"Only a poor little penny. It was all she had to give, But as pennies make the guineas, It may help some cause to live."

"God loveth a cheerful giver. Though the gift be poor and small; What can he think of his children Who never give at all?"

A brother who had given his thousands said, "I enjoy the privilege of giving every Sabbath and of making it a part of my worship." Too many have neglected this grace and have suffered by it, and the great societies have suffered and are forced to retrenchment. Grace improved is grace kept. Grace neglected is grace lost, and that is retrenchment. Standing upon the promises of God, who holds the balance of power in all force, we can assuredly say that our spiritual interests will be advanced and our temporal will not suffer by returning heartily to neglected benevolence. Give constantly and thoughtfully and you will be habitually reminded of God's greater gift to you. Give little and give often and you will give best and most. It is the oft-repeated shower, not the flood, that brings the richer harvest; little medicine, taken often and at regular intervals, that restores health; small acts of kindness often done that wins the heart at last. So by little acts of benevolence often repeated, regularly, unremittently the most heartless selfishness, and closest penuriousness, is broken up to receive more largely of his spirit who gave himself. Let giving become a habit, for habit forms character, and character works out destiny.

There is a legend to the following effect: Three maidens anxiously disputed as to which had the most beautiful hand. One sat by the stream, and dipping her hand in the water held it up. Another picked berries till her fingers were pink; another gathered violets until her hands were fragrant. An old decrepit woman passing by asked, "Who will give me a gift, for I am poor?" The three maidens denied her. Another who sat near, unadorned with flowers, unstained with fruit, unwashed in the stream,

gave her gift. Then the decrepit woman spoke to the maidens, "What is the controversy?" They told her, lifting up their beautiful hands before her. But when they asked her which is the most beautiful hand, she replied, "Not the hand that is washed in the brook, not the hand that is garlanded with fragrant flowers, but the hand that hath given; that is the most beautiful hand." As she said these words, her wrinkles fled, her staff was thrown away, and her voice became acclian, and she stood before them an angel from heaven, with the wisdom and authority to decide the question.—Standard.

ETHEL'S CONFESSION.

"If I could only be sure that I am a Christian!" sighed Ethel Morris.

Poor Ethel! Had she opened her mind to some one, she might have been; but it was her timid, sensitive nature to keep all to herself, and let the weight rest heavy upon her.

She had been led to expect some sudden and wonderful change, and thought she must be able to point out the very day and hour of her conversion.

One day in midwinter the new minister came to call. It so happened there was no one at home with Ethel except one of the boys, who disappeared when he saw who it was. So Ethel was left to entertain the minister, or rather he entertained her, for he was one of those genial, whole-souled men who win souls for the Master wherever they are.

She did not know how it was done, but it was not long before he had drawn from her an account of her trouble.

"My child," he said, "your fear is that you are not a Christian—that you are not converted. Let us talk over it a little. Paul was changed from persecuting the Lord to serving. You never hated him?"

"No," said Ethel.

"But perhaps several years ago—say five—you were indifferent to him?"

"Yes," answered Ethel, wondering a little what all this would lead to.

"Did you love to read religious books five years ago?"

Ethel shook her head.

"Do you now?"

"Yes."

"Did you put other people's happiness before your own, five years ago?"

"No," answered Ethel, a flash of surprise in her eyes that he could know so well.

"Do you now?"

"I try to."

"Did you love to pray five years ago?"

"No."

"Do you now?"

"Yes," and the girl's tone was unmistakable.

"Did you accept God as your Father, and Jesus Christ as your Saviour, to love and serve, all your life, five years ago?"

"No."

"Do you now?"—very tenderly and earnestly spoken.

Ethel's tears broke forth.

"Oh, I hope and trust so!" she said.

"And all these changes have taken place within the last five years?"

"Yes."

The minister took her hand in his. "My child," he said, "you have made the change as truly as did Paul. From going one way you have turned to the opposite. What greater change could there be? Surely what the Lord has accepted, his disciples need not refuse. In his name, I ask you to come and be one of us."

When communion day came again, Ethel ate at the table of her Lord; nothing doubting, nothing fearing, but fully trusting that he who gave himself for us, will also freely give us all things.—Baptist Weekly.

SIN'S PENALTY.

If by a single blow the law of gravitation could be perverted, depriving the harmony of the physical universe, and causing worlds and systems of worlds to dash together in wild confusion, would not that be a very serious matter? What the principle of gravitation is to the natural world, that the law of God is to the moral world, binding all moral creatures in harmony with one another and all to the throne of God. All the requirements of the law are summed up in one word, and that word is love. It is against love that sin wars, and therefore against the well-being and happiness of all the creatures that God has made.

Now, unless sin be removed, man's unhappiness, which lies in his separation from God, will forever continue. "The wages of sin is

death." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil." "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Every sin, according to the Scriptures, deserves the wrath and curse of God, both in this life and in that which is to come; or, in other words, everlasting perdition is the penalty of God's violated law. What an awful penalty!

But some object to the possibility of such a penalty being inflicted on the ground of its severity. It is asked, "Shall one sin consign the soul to the penalty of eternal death?" Certainly, from the very nature of sin. The penalty can be diverted only by a restoration of the divine image. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them."

When a man burns down the house of his neighbor, he is arrested and convicted for the crime of arson. But the person convicted for burning down one house, is as certainly exposed to the penalty as if he had burned down a thousand. If this principle is correct in human law, why not also in the divine? St. James says: "He that offendeth in one point is guilty of all." If one link is broken the whole chain falls to the ground. So with man's chain of righteousness; it has been broken by sin. "There is none righteous, no, not one."

Another objects that "there is no proportion between the time occupied in the commission of sin, and the duration of the punishment." Is there any reference made to the time occupied in the commission of an offence against civil law? When a man draws a pistol on another, and kills him in a second of time, he is arrested and tried for wilful murder. Suppose, however, his lawyer should plead for the acquittal of the murderer on the ground that it took only a second of time to kill him. What judge or jury on that ground would have a right to acquit the man? Human law lays no stress on the time occupied in its violation; the simple question is, touching the fact of the violation. When the fact is established, the law demands that the penalty should follow. If this principle is correct in human law, why is it not also in the divine? The human is based on the divine. If, moreover, the violation of the human law demands the life of the transgressor, why should not the violation of the divine law demand the forfeiture of the soul?—Rev. P. Bergstresser, D. D., in *Lutheran Quarterly*.

DON'T.

Don't forget to pray often for your pastor.

Don't think that a word of commendation and a hearty "God bless you," will make your pastor vain.

Don't scatter all of your roses during the first month of the pastorate, and don't keep them all until the pastor dies or resigns.

Don't forget that your pastor has been chosen by you, under divine guidance, to be your church leader; and that as pastor he should know the condition of each department of the work.

Don't carry to your pastor personal difficulties which you ought to settle among yourselves; and don't burden him with questions which God only can answer.

Don't forget that your pastor is a man—a real flesh and blood man—with feelings as tender and rights as sacred as the rest of humanity.

Don't tire your pastor by telling him the faults of his predecessors, and in the words of a good Scotch divine, "Don't sweeten your pastor's tea with praises of his predecessors."

Don't reply to every suggestion your pastor may make, "It has been our custom to do it differently."

Don't say too frequently, "When I was at Perfection street church we used to do it in that way."

Don't make other engagements thoughtlessly for prayer-meeting evenings.

Don't forsake your church prayer-meetings; and don't sit in the back seat and look solemn, and then go out and say, "What a dull meeting we had!"

Don't leave your own service Sunday morning to attend some other church, and in the evening tell about what a "beautiful service" you had.

Don't be offended if, after you have "talked in meeting" fifteen minutes, the pastor suggests, "Let us all try to be brief!"

Don't think your pastor omniscient; and if you should chance to be sick for 48 hours without his calling upon you, don't scold.

Don't remain from church for several weeks, and when your pastor calls to see you, say, "Why

what a stranger you are! I thought you had forgotten me!"

Don't overlook your promises to cheerfully furnish your pastor financial support; and don't forget that he expects of you prompt and hearty fulfillment.

Don't forget that you have personal duties to your pastor and the church which no other can perform.

Don't expect your pastor's wife to be a church and Sunday-school missionary, except you engage her for that purpose.—*Zion's Advocate*.

SOMETHING I WITNESSED.

I was out Gospel-rangin', and was quartered for the night with a brother who had five children; four were at home with him and one had gone to be with the Lord. The bright rays of the early sun, as they poured between the pot-plants and into the warm sitting room on that winter week-day morning, were no more cheery than the six faces which greeted me when I sat down with the family for its morning meal. Nor was the meal itself, although it seemed to be absolutely perfect in its quality, preparation, and appointments, more simple, savory, and substantial than the dish of family worship which followed it. I noticed that those children were not compelled to worship God on an empty stomach, as are some poor unfortunates. Right joyously they trooped into the front room and took their places for the daily family worship. First came the reading of the Scriptures which was interspersed with bright and earnest questions and with reverent remarks. The portion read struck me as wonderfully vivid and real. Then came a commandment from this one, and a benediction from that, with some sweet little application to the family life of the day before. Then followed two or three questions from the Catechism, and I saw that in the answering the virtue of accuracy was encouraged. Next we prayed, and after a short and simple prayer by the leader the older ones added each their special petitions, when all repeated the Lord's Prayer in unison. Then there was sung one of the standard hymns of the Church. Any thing more? Yes, while the baby lay in the mother's lap, the rest rose, and after joining hands so as to make a complete circle, in which the stranger also was invited to a place, the doxology was sung. When the third line was reached and they sang, "Praise God above, ye heavenly host," I noticed that they all glanced toward the mantel-piece, and on it I saw the photograph of a little boy who bore the family likeness, but was not present. There was method in that family worship. But it took time, a good deal of time, full twenty minutes. Did it? Well, what is time for?—*Advocate*.

BY DEGREES.

John Newton says Satan seldom comes to Christians with great temptations, or with a great temptation, or with a temptation to commit a great sin. You bring a green log and a candle together, and they are very safe neighbors; but bring a few shavings and set them alight, and then bring a few small sticks and let them take fire, and the log be in the midst of them, and you will soon get rid of your log. And so it is with little sins. You will be startled with the idea of committing a great sin, and so the devil brings you a little temptation, and leaves you to indulge yourself. "There is no harm in this," "no great peril in that," and so by these little chips we are first easily lighted up and at last the great log is burned. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.

A VOLUME OF PHILOSOPHY.

A passenger said to the pilot of a steamboat: "You have been a long time, I suppose, at this business?"

"Yes," answered the pilot, "upwards of twenty years."

"You know, then," pursued the passenger, "every rock and shoal?"

"Not by a long way," was the answer, "but I know where the deep water is."

Be sure you sail in the deep waters, and you will keep clear of many a rock and shoal.

Learn to entwine with your prayers the small cares, the trifling sorrows, the little wants of daily life. Whatever affects you—be it changed look, an altered tone, an unkind word, a wrong, a wound, a demand you can not meet, a change you can not notice, a sorrow you can not disclose—turn it into prayer, and send it up to God. Disclosures you may not make to man you can make to the Lord. Man may be too little for your great matters, God is not too great for your small ones. Only give yourself to prayer—whatever be the occasion that calls for it.

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