

How to Settle Church Difficulties.

[The following paper, prepared by Rev. G. A. Hartley, by request of the ministers' Conference of 1893, was read in the session of 1894, both in Ministers' Conference and in the General Conference.]

Brethren, you have asked me to write for this Conference, a paper on how to settle church difficulties, which duty, I confess, I undertake with misgiving. As I have thought the matter over, it has increased in importance to myself.

The first thing I wish to say however is, that there should be no church difficulties to be settled. The very term, "church quarrels," brings cold chills to one's soul. In a christian church there should always be found such a spirit of true brotherly care and love, that church troubles could no more exist, than darkness could appear in the presence of bright light.

But, alas! How well the Saviour knew. And how sadly many of his people know. Offences do come. We are compelled to recognize them. Papers would it be for churches if such sad experiences were entirely prevented. Prevention would be better than settlement, even at the proportion of once to pound. I believe much could, and should be done on this line. If greater care were exercised over the reception of church members, and ministers would be more anxious about the quality than the quantity, and the members themselves were more fully consecrated, so that the number of cold, backslidden, selfish and wilful members were reduced to nil., there certainly would be fewer cases amongst brethren needing adjustment. But we now have to deal with churches and church difficulties as we find them.

The question in hand is, how to settle them. That they should be settled all agree. But the way, the how, is the grand question. Let me here say emphatically, once for all, that I think all church difficulties should be settled scripturally, and in the loving spirit of a saving gospel. Too frequently, if the Law of the Head of the church is not ignored, it is overlooked. Often where a difficulty has arisen between two brethren, each tries to justify himself and condemn the other. This kind of stake-driving is always wrong and unscriptural on both sides. Each in an unselfish spirit should seek to "gain," not to condemn, his brother. Each should have upmost in his heart, the doing of the will of God, whatever that might involve. Church members should be "pitiful and courteous" towards each other. As with nations, so it is with churches and even with individuals, those who are least governed are best governed. Those who do right for the sake of right, or for righteousness sake, need the least application of the law to govern them.

In the matter of doing right, no one should make his right-losing contingent upon what he might think to be right doing by the other party. Do, because it is right to do, should be our motto. Now to the Law of the Master. Our wise Lord and Law-giver has left to his church plain and full instructions touching these matters of offences and trespasses amongst brethren, with carefully expressed details as to the mode of procedure. In the gospel by Matt. we have this law. There are two especial cases given. One treats the matter from the side of duty to an offended brother, while in the other case it gives us the way to deal with the brother offending. The first of these is in Matt. 5c. 23, 24 vs. Here is our Lord's law clearly setting forth the duty of the offender to the offended, or to "thy brother who hath ought against thee." Of course, that brother has reason for having aught against the other. He has been offended. Hearken. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." This case touches christian life at every turn. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar." This includes the time of family worship, when our prayers are set before Him as incense, as well as the time of public or congregational worship, when we "enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise." In these frequent times of bringing our gifts to the altar, we are brought in a very straight place and condition.

As to our fitness to present our gifts. Unless the giver is in a right condition of heart to offer it, the gift cannot be acceptable unto God. Such gifts, now, as it was in the days of Malachi, are but "polluted bread upon God's altar." How intensely important then that worshippers understand this sacred condition. "And there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee." Yes, here one

remembers these things. Memory is often the voice by which the Spirit of God speaks, especially at the time of prayer and communion with God. When one remembers that his brother hath aught, or anything, against him, he will also remember that he has given that brother occasion. Then the law of the Lord does not say, persist and force polluted bread upon the altar. It does not say, stifle conscience and disregard the voice of memory. But it does say, "leave thy gift before the altar." Not take away thy gift and forsake the altar. But leave it there for the time being, and "first be reconciled to thy brother, then come and offer thy gift." The question here arises, how can such a one become reconciled to his offended brother? To this I reply that, it seems to me there is only one scriptural way by which this reconciliation can be effected. It is by an open, honest, unreserved confession of the wrong done, and by asking the offended brother's forgiveness. In this way we all sought reconciliation with God, when we remembered that He had aught against us. We confessed our sins, and penitently prayed for forgiveness. In this same way the Master teaches us to become reconciled to our offended brother who hath aught against us. It is always wise and safe to practice God's ways. He further says "And then come and offer thy gift." Then come. The way is now clear. He did not send him away to remain away. It was that he might do what would give him acceptance to the altar. First go, and then come and do thy first work. "Offer thy gift." Thank God. He wants all our gifts. But he must have honest offerings, or he can take no pleasure in them.

In the other case given by our Lord, we have the reverse side of this matter. As recorded in Matthew 18th chapter, 15, 16, and 17 verses, Jesus taught, "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast 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."

This case though mentioned twelve chapters after the other seems to me to be quite as important. It is here supposed that some member of the church has done some action, or said some thing which wrongs another member, so that they are thrown apart, and have lost love and care for each other. Now in this case what is to be done? Who is to act first? And how is he to act? It is now the brother trespassing against who is to act first. "If thy brother trespass against thee go and tell him." It must not be merely an imaginary case. It must be more than the result of jealousy or suspicion. It must be a matter of certain knowledge, or of sufficient evidence to justify the brother in believing he has been trespassed against. Then the path of duty is made clear.

The injured brother is to go to his brother who has trespassed against him and tell him his fault alone. Not tell it first to outside people, or even to the pastor or the church. But "tell him alone." And tell him "his fault." Not tell him what brother A, or sister B says, about the matter. But tell him his fault alone. Had our Lord said tell everybody except him, what obedient disciples many church members would be. It should not be forgotten, that the moment one tells his brother's fault, to any one else, before telling it to him he makes himself a trespasser. Great care should be taken, that in going and telling, it should not be done in the cold tones of superiority, or in the burning words of injured dignity, but in the spirit of humility and brotherly care, aiming at gaining his brother. This is no easy task to do rightly. But when this course is pursued, and brethren plainly, distinctly, and straightforwardly tell each other wherein they have done wrong, and where it hurts, in a large percentage of the cases of church difficulties, peace and harmony would be restored. This law seems so seldom carried out, that we have but a feeble idea of the frequent successes that would result, if it should always be acted upon in faithful loyalty to Christ and love to the offending brother. But if the offender persists in wrong, and adds sin to sin, while the other knows him to be guilty, what then? Is the labour over? Not yet. "If he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more." This is the second step. Great care should be taken in the selection of these "one

or two." They are to be witnesses. If there are those who know the fault or guilt of the accused, these should be taken as witnesses, by whom to prove and sustain the charge, hoping that in this way the trespasser might be brought to confess his fault and seek forgiveness. Of course this second step can be taken only when the first has failed. Sometimes the advice and labour of these witnesses may accomplish what the aggrieved brother failed to do, even when he had faithfully carried out the law of the Master. These selected brethren should be men of acknowledged piety, candor, and good judgment, such as are not reasonably objectionable to the offending brother. They should act the part of mediators and peacemakers, seeking to gain, and to restore brotherly love, remembering that both the accused and the accuser are their brethren. As their mission is to make peace, they should, if possible, be mutual friends. This step is preparing the way for a church trial and should be taken very wisely. If these brethren find the accuser in fault in spirit or deed, or find him inclined to magnify little things, they should expostulate as faithfully with him as with the accused. After hearing all that is to be said, *pro*, and *con*, they are to use their best influence and wisdom, and give such advice, as in their judgment, the case requires. If in giving advice to the offender he neglects to hear them, then they should advise the aggrieved brother to "tell it to the church." Telling it to the church, is the third and last step which the aggrieved brother is to take in the matter. When he has laid the facts of his case, and the testimony of the witnesses, whom he took with him, before the church, he has done his duty. He may rest his case here, the church should now take the matter in hand.

The offending brother should then be called upon to "hear the church." If the offence with which he has been charged, is fully proved, the church should require him to give satisfaction. They may expostulate with him and labour in every way that may seem to them scriptural and brotherly, for even now he may relent, and may be gained. But if all this labour and all these appeals are in vain, then the fourth and last step in this painful process is unavoidable. "If he neglect to hear the church, let him be to thee, as a heathen man and a publican." This is to withdraw fellowship from him, and leave him outside the church, where his own wrongs, and his rejection of council, and refusal to repent have justly placed him. Refusal to be reconciled to a brother after being dealt with according to the Law of Christ is a sin against the fellowship, authority and welfare of the church.

Thus far I have spoken only of what may be called personal or private offences. There is another kind of church troubles, that may be classed as public offences, which cannot be dealt with in the same manner, as private trespasses, because they have not been committed against any individual in particular, and no one can make them personal matters. These are offences against morality, or religion, or against the church, such as intemperance, profanity, Sabbath breaking, frequenting improper places of amusement, disseminating false doctrines, sowing discord, neglecting covenant obligations and other like wrongs.

Touching immoralities, the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 5c. 11 to 13 vs. gives the church the safe rule. He says, "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." Of those who deny the essential truths of the gospel, or who believe errors that are subversive of the truth, the same Apostle says, "If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed." "Though we or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed."

"If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." Of those who make divisions and disturbance in the church. Paul says, "A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject." And "Mark those which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them." It is obvious from these and other passages and from the nature of the case that it is a duty of the church and of the denomination as well, to reject those who reject the gospel as they understand and teach it.

Other cases might be cited, but enough has been said to show that I believe that the settlement of church

difficulties should be according to the Scriptures. The word of God is profitable not only for doctrine, but also for correction and reproof. All church discipline should be undertaken in the spirit of love and with a purpose to "gain" the offending brother. Brethren of the ministry, if these be the Master's truths and teachings, then it devolves upon us, not only to practice, but to teach and enforce them.

The Touch of Christ.

During the civil war word came to a mother that her boy had been wounded. She found her way to the hospital at the front. The doctor said to her: "Your boy is fast asleep. If you go in and wake him, the excitement will kill him. By and by, when he wakes, I will break the news to him gradually."

The mother, with her great hungry heart yearning to see her boy, looked into the doctor's face: "He may never awaken. If you will let me sit by his side, I promise not to speak to him." The doctor consented. She crept to the side of the cot, and looked into the face of her boy. How she longed to embrace him! She could not resist laying her gentle, loving hand on his forehead. The moment her fingers touched the boy's brow his lips moved, and he whispered without opening his eyes, "Mother, you have come." Even in his sleep he knew the touch of love.

The human touch on lives that need comfort, healing, and blessing carries wonderful power. But shall we not bow our heads for the touch of Christ Himself? He lays His hand gently and lovingly upon our brow. Some of us may be in sorrow; some are in care; some have their burdens. But do you not recognize that soft touch of Christ's hand—the hand that the nail pierced? May the touch give joy and a blessing to every one!—J. R. Miller.

Keep Right with God.

A child of God should not leave his bedroom in the morning without being on good terms with his God. We should not dare to go into the world and feel, "I am out of harmony with my Lord. All is not right between God and my soul." In domestic life we are wise if we square matters before we separate for the day; let us part with a kiss. This method of unbroken fellowship should be carefully maintained toward God. Be at perfect rest with him. "Acquaint thyself with him, and be at peace, for thereby good shall come unto thee." If you cannot get rest with God, perhaps some fault of character may prevent you enjoying that perfect rest. See where that flaw is. Are you living in any sin? If so, the sun may have risen, but there is a bandage over your eyes; you will still be in the dark. Get rid of that which binds you. Or are you trusting yourself as well as trusting in Christ? Are you relying on your experience? Then I do not wonder if you miss the rest of faith. Get rid of all that spoils the simplicity of your faith. Come to the Lord, and rest in him; tell out your grief to Jesus, and he will breathe on you, and say, "Peace be unto you."

Seizing Opportunities.

A lady, once, writing to a young man in the navy, who was almost a stranger, thought, "Shall I close this as anybody would, or shall I say a word for my Master?" and, lifting up her heart for a moment, she wrote, telling him that his constant change of scene and place was an apt illustration of the word, "Here we have no continuing city," and asked if he could say, "I seek one to come." Tremblingly, she folded it and sent it off.

Back came the answer, "Thank you so much for those kind words! I am an orphan, and no one has spoken to me like that since my mother died, long years ago." The arrow shot at venture hit home, and the young man shortly after rejoined in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of peace.

How often do we, as Christians, close a letter to those we know have no hope "as anybody would," when we might say a word for Jesus! Shall we not embrace each opportunity in the future?

THE JOY OF SALVATION—Many have need to pray, "Restore unto me the joys of thy salvation!" Increasing worldly cares, absorption in temporal affairs, indulgence of temptations to stay away from the means of grace on the plea of weariness or lack of time, and a thousand other things, have conspired gradually and almost insensibly to lead them into indifference and coldness. They realize that they no longer possess the joys of salvation, and find themselves fettered in efforts for a better state. Reader, is this your case? Then at once, and earnestly, take up the Psalmist's petition. Let no pressing business cares, no political excitement, no worldly amuse-

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ment, keep you from communion with God and the joy which comes only from intimate fellowship with your loving Saviour.

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Random Readings.

Be cheerful, hopeful and kind. A quiet conscience makes one so serene.—Byron.

A smile is a song without words or music.

Be strong to carry out your good resolutions.

When I seek another's joy, I find both his and mine.

A Christian is one who knows the truth, loves it and lives it.

God delights in the heart in which pure thoughts are made welcome.

The only antidote to the bitterness of life is the sweetness of Christ's love.

There are a hundred kinds of religion, but only one kind of piety.—H. W. Shaw.

There is no greater genuine in this world than the genuine for doing one's best.

The measure of our success is in proportion as we satisfy God.—Dr. Krummacher.

"The truth shall make you free," and this is the best freedom man can enjoy for it is lasting.

Christian privileges enlarge as the heart fills up with the knowledge and love of Christ.

Liberality consists less in giving much than in giving in the right way and at the right moment.

Suspicion finds poor comfort when it enters a pure mind. There it is ever an unwelcome guest.

If you are brethren of Christ try to be so like him that every one will recognize the family likeness.

The grace of Jesus Christ is to the soul what food is to the body—nourishment, strength, life, energy.

Enjoyment of the Christian increases with the increase of faith and the growth of Christian love and knowledge.

An active mind when in good condition, not only employs itself but is almost sure to give wholesome employment to others.

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